PGEG S4 02

Exam Code : LCT 2

Literary and Critical Theory II

SEMESTER IV

ENGLISH

BLOCK 3

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SEMESTER 4

MA IN ENGLISH

COURSE 2: LITERARY AND CRITICAL THEORY II

BLOCK 3: FROM TORIL MOI TO EDWARD SAID

DETAILED SYLLABUS

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Edward Said: Life and Works, Reading the text, Important theoretical Issues raised, Reception of Said

BLOCK 3: INTRODUCTION

Block 3 of the course Literary and Critical Theory II contains a total of five units, the details of which are as the following:

Unit 11: In this unit, we shall discuss the ideas or concepts like Female, Feminine, Feminist as conceived by Toril Moi. Toril Moi's essay "Female, Feminine and Feminist" not only problematises the textual and apolitical focus of the literary feminism but also interrogates the homogeneity of experience that is attributed to women. As we finish reading the unit, we shall see how Toril Moi also discusses the contributions of French feminism in understanding some of the important political and theoretical issues of feminist criticism.

Unit 12: In this unit we shall discuss Elaine Shwoalter's essay "Towards a Feminist Poetics" which is yet another important Feminism. We shall note that the women's suffrage movement of the nineteenth century was also a women's rights movement where women fought for the right to vote. In her essay *Towards A Feminist Poetics* (1979), Showalter analyses feminist criticism from varied perspectives. She mostly concentrates on five dominant areas; namely, woman as reader, woman as writer, feminist critique and its problems, aims of gynocritics, and finally the three phases that the history of women's literature can be divided into, the feminine, the feminist, and the female stage.

Unit 13: This unit by Gayatri Spivak should be studied particularly with reference to postcolonial and subaltern studies. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak who is also an award-winning critic with an international repute for her scholarly contributions worldwide, has been an important name in theory and the essay, which we shall study in this unit, established Spivak among the ranks of feminists who consider history, geography and class when thinking about women.

Unit 14: In this unit, we shall discuss Homi Bhabha's essay "Narrating the Nation" which is also the Introduction to his book *Nation and Narration* (1990). This book is primarily an intervention into "essentialist" readings of nationality that attempt to define and naturalize Third World "nations" by means of the supposedly homogenous, innate, and historically continuous traditions that falsely define and ensure their subordinate status. Nations, in Bhabha's views, are "narrative" constructions that arise from the "hybrid" interaction of contending cultural constituencies.

Unit 15: In this unit, we shall make an attempt to examine the concept of orientalism through a reading of the "Introduction" to Edward Said's *Orientalism.* Said's *Orientalism* is regarded as one of the major

contributions in this area as it brought to focus the ways in which non- Western cultures had been subjected to the hegemonic construction of the West.

While going through a unit, you may also notice some text boxes, which have been included to help you know some of the difficult terms and concepts. You will also read about some relevant ideas and concepts in “LET US KNOW” along with the text. We have kept “CHECK YOUR PROGRESS” questions in each unit. These have been designed to self-check your progress of study. The hints for the answers to these questions are given at the end of the unit. We strongly advise that you answer the questions immediately after you finish reading the section in which these questions occur. We have also included a few books in the “FURTHER READING” which will be helpful for your further consultation. The books referred to in the preparation of the units have been added at the end of the block. As you know the world of literature and criticism is too big, we strongly advise you not to take a unit to be an end in itself. Despite our attempts to make a unit self-contained, we advise that you read the original texts of the authors prescribed as well as other additional materials for a thorough understanding of the contents of a particular unit.

UNIT 11: TORIL MOI: "FEMALE, FEMININE, FEMINIST" FROM *SEXUAL TEXTUAL POLITICS*

UNIT STRUCTURE

11.1 Learning Objectives

11.2 Introduction

11.3 Toril Moi: Life and Works

11.4 Reading the Text: "Femal, Feminine, Feminist"

11.5 Important Theoretical Issues Raised

11.6 Reception of Toril Moi

11.7 Let us Sum up

11.8 Further Reading

11.9 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

11.10 Possible Questions

11.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- discuss the life and works of the feminist critic Toril Moi
- explain feminist critiques of the patriarchal social order
- identify the connections between feminism and poststructuralist thought
- read and respond to key ideas, concepts, and concerns of Anglo-American feminist criticism

11.2 INTRODUCTION

This is the first unit of Block 3. In this unit, we shall try to discuss the ideas of concepts like Female, Feminine, Feminist as conceived by Toril Moi. Feminism has always focused on gender right from its inception. While, Feminist studies has called attention to the ways in which patriarchal domination of women have repressed and silenced women's voices throughout history. As part of the feminist enterprise, feminist critics and theorists have focused on the rehabilitation of forgotten and marginalised

female writers. The attempt to establish a female tradition of writing was a major focus of much of American feminist studies in the seventies and the eighties. Toril Moi's essay not only problematises the textual and apolitical focus of the literary feminism but also interrogates the homogeneity of experience that is attributed to women. As we finish reading the unit, we shall see how Toril Moi also discusses the contributions of French feminism in understanding some of the important political and theoretical issues of feminist criticism.

11.3 TORIL MOI: LIFE AND WORKS

Toril Moi is an important voice within feminist studies. Her seminal work *Sexual/Textual Politics* (1985) is an important intervention within feminist studies that argues for a political and theoretical approach to criticism as against merely textual criticism. Toril Moi was born in Norway in 1953 and graduated from the University of Bergen and earning her doctorate in 1980. She began her academic career at Oxford University in England in 1983 where she researched and taught on the areas of gender, sexuality and body, which later culminated in the publication of *Sexual Textual Politics.*

Moi joined the literature and romance studies department at Duke University in Durham, North Carolina in 1989. She has continued to expand her analytical work on gender and sexuality especially concerning the contribution of French feminism towards feminist politics. She has edited the writings of French feminists Julia Kristeva and Luce Irigaray. She has also edited a collection of essays *The Kristeva Reader* (1986) and a book on French Feminism *French Feminist Thought* (1987). Moi's writings on Simon de Beauvoir have tried to rehabilitate the significance of her work in contemporary feminism. Her work *Feminist Theory and Simone de Beauvoir* comprises a critical overview of Moi's literary theory and two essays on Beauvoir by Moi. Another important work of Toril Moi is *What is a Woman?* That sees her engaging with feminist theory once more since the publication of *Sexual/Textual Politics.* Toril Moi has also received several prestigious fellowships including the 2001 Guggenheim fellowship and a fellowship at

Harvard University in 2002-03, where she researched on the works of the Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen.



LET US KNOW

***Sexual Textual Politics*: The significance of the book**

Toril Moi's *Sexual Textual Politics* was published in 1985. It is a thought provoking and illuminating work that examines and analyses the methods, principles and politics that inform Anglo-American feminist discourses. Moi's work not only engages with feminist critiques of the patriarchal order but also identifies the ways feminist studies can appropriate poststructuralist theoretical models to further the aims of feminist critical studies. She is especially interested in the works of French feminists like Helene Cixous and Julia Kristeva and the implications it has for feminist studies. Her work represents an ongoing process of questioning of the various theoretical models and the political strategies within feminist studies.

11.4 READING THE TEXT: FEMALE, FEMININE, FEMINIST"

Toril Moi's essay "Feminist, Female, Feminine" shows the different ways in which feminists have used these terms. One of the main goals of the essay, as Moi states, is to demonstrate the clear differences between these terms in order to show "what the crucial political and theoretical issues of contemporary feminist criticism really are" (117). Toril Moi differentiates between these three terms. According to her 'feminism' is a political position, "femaleness" refers to biology and "femininity" is a cultural construct. Moi mentions that feminist criticism and theory must provide a critique of patriarchal social order. In order to do this, feminist critics and theorists must expose the pervasive inequalities and structures of power that support male dominance and constitute "'perhaps the most pervasive ideology of our culture and provides its most fundamental concept of power'" (118).

Feminism is now a new branch of study and because its methodological impulses carry a political slant, feminists therefore find

themselves in a position that is quite similar to other radical approaches: "speaking from their marginalised positions on the outskirts of the academic establishment, they strive to make explicit the politics of the so called 'neutral' or objective works of their colleagues as well as to act as cultural critics in the widest sense of the word" (118). At the same time, this peripheral status also sets feminists free to be "tolerantly pluralistic" in their selection of methods and theories. In other words, they can draw from a variety of sources. She calls this 'appropriation' or creative transformation. Moi indicates the fact that there is no true female intellectual tradition, but the feminists do not in any way minimise the legitimacy of such an enterprise. Such acts of creative appropriation does not in any way diminish the value of this epistemology simply because "there is no pure feminist or female space from which we can speak" given the pervasiveness of patriarchal power and "all ideas including feminist ones, are in this sense 'contaminated' by patriarchal ideology" (118). What is important is not the origin or source of the idea but the "the use to which it is put and the effects it can produce" (118). As Toril Moi states, "What matters is therefore not so much whether a particular theory was formulated by a man or a woman, but whether its effects can be characterised as sexist or feminist in a given situation" (118-119). As an example of this type of appropriation, Moi cites the example of French feminists who have revisited Freudian psychoanalytic theories to offer a "feminist analyses of sexual difference and the construction of gender in patriarchy." (120)



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

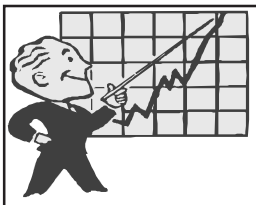
Q 1: What does Toril Moi's essay endeavour to do?

Q 2: How does Moi use the idea of appropriation in relation to feminist epistemology?

The essay makes a further differentiation between female and feminist. According to Toril Moi, being female is not synonymous with feminist practice. She states that if feminist criticism is characterised by its political commitment against all forms of patriarchal dominance, then the mere fact of biology is not commensurate with a feminist practice: "It is a truism, but it still needs to be said that not all books written by women on women

writers exemplify anti-patriarchal commitment…A female tradition in literature or criticism is not necessarily a feminist one" (120). Moi refers to Rosalind Coward who discusses the erroneous association of feminist with female writing in her essay "Are Women's Novels Feminist Novels?" Coward argues that women cantered writings need not be about feminism. She gives the example of Mills and Boons novels that are "written by, read by, marketed for and are all about women" (120). These novels based as they are on themes of 'sexual, racial and class submission" are hardly the kind to further the aims of feminism. The reason for such confusion is a false belief that "the very fact of describing experience typical of women is a feminist act" (120).

While this idea of making visible women's experiences from the systemic repression of patriarchy does make sense as an anti-patriarchal strategy to some extent, one must be careful to remember that "women's experience can be made visible in alienating, deluded or degrading ways: The Mills and Boons accounts of female love or Anita Bryant's praise of heterosexual love and motherhood are not per se emancipator reading for women" (121). Thus, while acknowledging the importance of the female experience to the exercise of feminism, Moi cautions against the tendency to reduce feminist practice to a mere representation of female experience: "Although crucially shaped by its anti-patriarchal emphasis on female experience, feminism as a political theory cannot be reduced to a reflection or a product of that experience" (121). In other words, Moi's idea of feminist critical theory is to go beyond textual or a political approaches, "It is not its object, but its political perspective which gives feminist criticism its (relative) unity" (122). Another interesting point Moi raises in the essay is whether men can be feminists or feminist critics. Moi states that men can be provided they understand the purpose of feminism vis a vis their 'different' position as men otherwise it will dilute the very reason of feminist criticism: "…the would be male feminist critic ought to ask himself whether he as a male is really doing feminism a service in our present situation by muscling in on the one cultural and intellectual space women have created for themselves within 'his' male-dominated discipline (122).



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 3: Who wrote the essay "Are women's Novels Feminist Novels?" What is its main argument?

Q 4: What does Toril Moi have to say on the question of whether men can be feminists?

Moi's essay also discusses the political pitfalls of collapsing the 'feminine' with 'female'. According to Moi, one of the problems of feminist politics is the problem of definition, i.e. how to define the terms female and feminine. The established usage is to represent femininity as a social construct and female to refer to the biological aspects of sexual difference. The representation of femininity is an outcome of patriarchal ideology that seeks to control female sexuality through the imposition of certain culturally/ socially sanctioned standards of femininity on all biological women "in order precisely to make us believe that the chosen standards for femininity are natural" (123). Patriarchal discourse normalises the idea of an intrinsic female nature. According to Moi, the feminists must resist such essentialism and stereotyping of female experience: "Feminists, on the contrary, have to disentangle this confusion, and must therefore always insist that though women undoubtedly are female there is no guarantee that they will be feminine" (123).

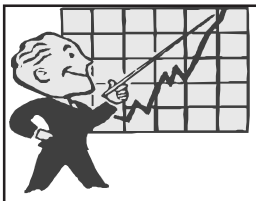
The problem for feminists then is to understand "whether it is desirable for feminists to try and fix the meaning of femininity at all" as any attempt at definition becomes a self-limiting condition and ends up falling into the trap of what Helene Cixous criticised as death-dealing binary oppositions: "There is a danger of turning a positive, feminist definition of femininity into a definition of femaleness, and thereby falling back into another patriarchal trap" (123). Helene Cixous in her essay "Sorties" has explored how binary thinking, "death-dealing binary thought" as she calls it, supports patriarchal values. Feminists therefore have a key role to play in understanding and challenging patriarchal binary thinking. Summarizing Cixous arguments, Moi says that feminist critical practice can undo such opposition by appropriating deconstructive criticism. Cixous criticises the

equation of femininity with passivity and death, as it leaves no positive space for women. As she states, "'either woman is passive or she does not exist'" (125). Cixous sees everything in the patriarchal world as related to the man/woman opposition where one is always superior to the other, i.e. they have a hierarchal relationship. Cixous finds this male/female binary opposition central to Western culture and philosophy. In this opposition, the inferior term is associated with the feminine, while the term that occupies the privileged position is associated with masculinity. Her work shows that it does not matter which 'couple' one chooses to highlight, "the hidden male/female opposition with its inevitable positive/negative evaluation can always be traced as the underlying paradigm" (125). Instead, Cixous proposes a new form of female writing, ecriture feminine that will escape the metaphysical trap of the phallocratic system: "Against any binary scheme of thought, Cixous sets multiple, heterogeneous difference" (126).

Psychoanalytic feminist theories have tried to critique the patriarchal social order through their emphasis on the Symbolic. Following the deconstruction theories of Derrida, French feminist Julia Kristeva refuses to define femininity. Instead of giving a definition of femininity, Kristeva prefers to see it as a position: "if femininity then can be said to have a definition at all in Kristevan terms, it is simply as that which is marginalised by the patriarchal symbolic order" (126). In this scheme of things, even men can be viewed as marginal to the symbolic order. As Moi points out by defining the category of woman, patriarchy represses them making it necessary to fight for their rights. Kristeva's notion of femininity as relational arises from her deep distrust of identity as constituted in the symbolic that leads her to reject any notion of ecriture feminine that is inherently female or feminine.

Thus, Kristeva does not offer a theory of femininity, rather her description of femininity as marginality theorises feminist struggle just like any other struggle against an overarching power structure. As Moi explains, "Kristeva's emphasis on marginality allows us to view this repression of the feminine in terms of positionality rather than essences" (127). While such positional perspective on the definition of femininity thwarts the dangers of biologism, it fails to address the political questions feminism raises: "An

adoption of Kristeva's 'deconstructed' form of feminism therefore in one sense leaves everything as it was—our positions in the political struggle have not changed; but in another sense, it radically transforms our awareness of the nature of that struggle" (129).



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 5: Discuss Helene Cixous's idea of "death dealing binary thought."

Q 6: How according to Toril Moi can appropriation of deconstructive criticism facilitate feminist politics?

Q 7: Explain Kristeva's concept of femininity as marginality.

Against this background, Moi elucidates that feminist criticism and theory prevalent may be divided into two categories: female criticism and feminine theory. Moi defines female criticism as a field, which can be analysed whether it is feminist or not, or whether it confuses female with feminine. Moi stresses that while apolitical study of female authors cannot be called feminist but in a male dominated context, "…an interest in women writers must objectively be considered a support for the feminist project of making women visible" (129). One just needs to remember that a female critic need not necessarily be a feminist one. As an example, Moi discusses the concept of Gynocriticism or the study of women writers.

According to Moi, this approach to feminist critical practice is problematic as it may at times reinforce the same stereotypes about woman that feminist studies want to dismantle. Moi states that the problem with works such as Elaine Showalter's *A Literature of Their Own* (1977) and Gilbert and Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979) is that they not only confuse femaleness with femininity but also affiliate femaleness/femininity with feminism. They are guilty of homogenizing "all female creative utterances into feminist self-expression" (130). Feminine theory, on the other hand, refers to theories concerned with the construction of femininity. From a feminist standpoint, this kind of study is "prone to attacks of biologism and often unwittingly turns into theories about female essences" (131). Moi however states that such categorisations are never desirable but they are

helpful in delineating the trajectory of feminist theory and politics: "All these three labels are not essences. They are categories as readers or critics operate" (132). Moi's own view is that "such conceptual terms are at once politically crucial and ultimately metaphysical; it is necessary at once to deconstruct the opposition between traditionally 'masculine' and traditionally 'feminine' values and to confront the full political force and reality of such categories" (131). In the end, these definitions/categorisations are not meant to be absolute or conclusive. They are best viewed as interventions to open up and carry forward the debate on the relevance and implications of feminist theory and politics.

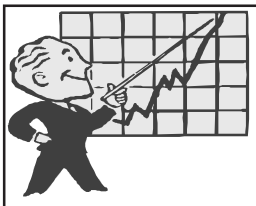
11.5 IMPORTANT THEORETICAL ISSUES RAISED

The following are the important issues addressed in the essay by Toril Moi

- Toril Moi's essay shows the differences between the terms feminist, female and feminine and what their implications are for feminist studies. According to Moi, 'feminist' is used to refer to the political aspect, 'female' refers to the biological component and 'femininity' is a cultural construction defined as a set of normative female characteristics.
- Moi further qualifies the distinction between female and feminine by saying that being female or female writing does not necessarily guarantee a feminist approach. It is a fallacy to assume women centered writing to always have a feminist approach. Also, the description of female experience cannot in all circumstances be said to be a feminist act.
- Toril Moi's essay addresses the problem of feminist methodology. How do feminists further the goal of knowledge making in the absence of any reliable source of feminist intellectual tradition? According to Moi, feminists must be pluralistic in their choice of literary methods and theories, i.e. they must work with existing ideas and must learn to 'appropriate' epistemology to their own ends as there is "no purely female intellectual tradition available to us"(119) . As she says, "there is no pure feminist or female space from which we can speak. All ideas,

including feminist ones, are in this sense 'contaminated' by patriarchal ideology." (118)

- To the question whether men can be feminists, Moi says yes men can be feminists. Men however must be aware of their different position from the standpoint of gender and the political strategies they use otherwise they risk diluting the very purpose of feminist enterprise.
- The essay raises the problem of definition for feminist studies i.e. how to define femininity: "…The question is, however, whether it is desirable for feminists to try to fix the meaning of femininity at all. Patriarchy has developed a whole series of 'feminine' characteristics. Should feminists then really try to develop another set of 'feminine' virtues, however desirable?"(123). This is because; language under phallogocentrism is highly imbricated in patriarchal discourse and lacks the means to embody authentic female experience.
- Summarizing the theories of the French feminist Helene Cixous, Moi demonstrates how the appropriation of deconstruction can have implications for feminist politics. Helene Cixous has emphasised the hierarchal nature of binary opposition through the use of the masculine/ feminine dichotomy. According to Cixous, binary opposition supports patriarchal values and "the hidden male/female opposition with its inevitable positive/negative evaluation can always be traced as the underlying paradigm" (125).
- Toril Moi discusses the contribution of French feminist Kristeva who defines femininity as a position of marginality. The problem with her positional perspective is that it does not sufficiently engage with the historical and social analyses. In other words, it leaves out the political questions that feminism addresses.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 8: Name the author of *A Literature of Their Own.*

Q 9: Name an important work by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar.

11.6 RECEPTION OF TORIL MOI

Toril Moi's *Sexual/textual Politics* initially received criticism from many Anglo-American feminists for its seemingly critical stance on feminist literary studies. Many academics and feminist critics considered her work to undermine the objectives and discourse of feminism. Some critics have questioned her work as oversimplifying Anglo-American feminist thought while some others have criticised her for overlooking the contribution of Afro-American and lesbian feminists. Critical reception of Moi's work in later years has been more positive, especially concerning her work on French feminism and her assessment of its influence on the development of Anglo American feminism. Critics have also praised her work on Simon de Beauvoir that is seen as a major contribution to the cultural history of feminism. Her essays in *What Is a Woman?* have mostly received positive reviews and may be seen as a sign of Moi's development as a feminist theorist as also the significance and relevance of Beauvoir's thought to contemporary gender studies. Her work *Sexual/textual Politics* is now applauded for having opened up a space for dialogue and healthy debate within feminist studies as also for indicating some of the weaknesses of contemporary feminism. The strength of her work lies in Moi's brilliant ideas that suggest that no literary text or its reading is politically neutral and that the politics of feminist critical studies demand critical re-examination.



11.7 LET US SUM UP

From this unit, we have learnt that Toril Moi's essay demonstrates the importance of theoretically nuanced and politically committed studies for feminist critical practice. Her own work she draws a great deal from the works of French feminism. Her work *Sexual/textual Politics* (1985) from where the essay "Female, Feminine, Feminist" is taken is a thought- provoking work on the intersection between feminism and post-structural thought. While she is credited as having coined the term "Anglo-American feminism", her work surveys the development of feminist studies in America and the influence of French feminism as an analytical tool for feminist literary studies.



11.8 FURTHER READING

Elaine Showalter. (1998). "A Literature of Their Own". Princeton University Press, subsequent edition.

Helene Cixous & Catherine Clement (1986). "Sorties: Out and Out: Attacks/ Ways Out/Forays." *The Newly Born Woman*. University of Minnessota Press.

Julia Kristeva. (1989). "Women's Time." In Catherine Belsey and Jane Moore. (Ed.). *The Feminist Reader: Essays in Gender and the Politics of Literary Criticism.* New York: Basil Blackwell.

Sandra Gilbert & Susan Gubar. (1979). *The Madwoman in the Attic*. Yale University Press.

Toril Moi. (1989). "Feminist, Female, Feminine." (Ed.). Catherine Belsey and Jane Moore. *The Feminist Reader: Essays in Gender and the Politics of Literary Criticism.* New York: Basil Blackwell.

11.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: Toril Moi's essay shows the difference ... …and what their... … for feminist studies.

Ans to Q 2: Toril Moi states that there is no true... …accessible to feminists. Feminists have to draw from... …as there is no pure... …given the pervasiveness of... …power.

Ans to Q 3: The essay "Are women's novels Feminist novels" is by Rosalind... ...She argues that writings need not be about... ...She gives the example of… ...that are written by... ...These novels are based on themes of… ...that does not resonate with the principles of… ...One of the reasons for such a confusion is a false... …that describing experience typical... …

Ans to Q 4: Moi states that men can be... ...provided they understand the purpose... ...vis a vis their 'different' position as men otherwise it will dilute the very reason of feminist criticism

Ans to Q 5: Helene Cixous concept of "death dealing binary thought" emphasises the ... …nature of… ...through the use of… ...Cixous is critical of binary opposition because it supports... ...Feminists must challenge… ...thinking

Ans to Q 6: Toril Moi states that it is not about whether a particular theory… ...by a man or woman but whether its effects can be... ...as... ....or… ...Moi gives the examples of… ...who have revisited... …to offer new insights into analyses of... …and the construction of… ...in patriarchy

Ans to Q 7: Kristeva refuses to define... ...Instead of giving a definition of femininity, Kristeva prefers to see it as a... …: "if femininity then can be said to have a definition at all in Kristevan terms, it is simply as that which is marginalised by the patriarchal symbolic order" (126). In this scheme of things, even... …can be viewed as… ...to the… ... order… …Kristeva's notion of… ...as… ...arises from her deep distrust of… ...that leads her to reject any notion of… ...feminine that is inherently female or feminine. Thus, Kristeva does not offer a theory of... …rather her description of femininity as… ...theorises feminist struggle just like any other struggle against an... ...power structure.

Ans to Q 8: The author of the book… ...is Showalter.

Ans to Q 9: An important work by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar is *The Madwoman*.



11.10 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: How does Toril Moi distinguish between feminist, female and feminine?

Q 2: "A female tradition in literature or criticism is not necessarily a feminist one." Explain.

Q 3: Moi states that behind the conflation of feminist with female texts is "a complex web of assumptions." What are some of the assumptions that Moi indicates?

Q 4: How does Toril Moi position her argument in relation to the idea of femininity as a cultural construct?

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UNIT 12: ELAINE SHWOALTER: "TOWARDS A FEMINIST POETICS"

UNIT STRUCTURE

12.1 Learning Objectives

12.2 Introduction

12.3 Elaine Shwoalter: Life and Works

12.4 Reading the Text: "Towards a Feminist Poetics"

12.5 Important Issues raised and Their Significance in Literary Studies

12.6 Reception of Shwoalter

12.7 Let us Sum up

12.8 Further Reading

12.9 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

12.10 Possible Questions

12.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- acquaint yourself with women's suffrage movement and the feminist movement.
- list the key feminist literary theorists and their major works.
- read about the life and works of Elaine Showalter
- analyze the three phases that the history of women's literature can be divided into
- explain terms such as Gynocriticism, Poetics, Feminist Critique, Suffrage, among others
- gain an idea of the essay by Showalter in the context of the feminist movement.

12.2 INTRODUCTION

In the previous unit, we have discussed Toril Moi's essay "Female, Feminine, Feminist" from her seminal book *Sexual Textual Politics.* In this unit, we shall discuss Elaine Shwoalter's essay "Towards a Feminist Poetics" which is yet another important text in the field. We shall note that

the women's suffrage movement of the nineteenth century was also a women's rights movement where women fought for the right to vote. This was followed by the feminist movement of the 20th century which called for equality in gender, leading the way for groundbreaking changes in political and economic emancipation of women mainly in the global North. This background paved the way for various women's organisations to spread awareness, and demand equal wages and legal rights in large parts of the world. For since time immemorial, human civilization has witnessed the domination of patriarchy where, as the French feminist Simone De Beauvoir in her groundbreaking text *The Second Sex* (1949) reiterates how man is the 'essential', the 'absolute' and woman is the 'inessential other'. So are the gender roles comprising masculinity and femininity. Beauvoir states, 'one is not born a woman, one becomes one' (Beauvoir 267). History brings to light how feminist critics for centuries struggled for the acknowledgment of the woman's role in society and gender equality, the primary feminist theorists being Mary Wollstonecraft (*A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, 1792), John Stuart Mill (*The Subjection of Women*, 1869), Virginia Woolf (*A Room of One's Own*), Simone de Beauvoir (*The Second Sex*, 1949), Elaine Showalter, Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray, Kate Millett, Judith Butler and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak to name a few. Specifically, in America, Mary Ellmann's *Thinking About Women* (1968) marked the onset of modern feminist criticism followed by Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* (1969) and Elaine Showalter's *A Literature Of Their Own: British Women Novelist From Bronte To Lessing* (1977). These feminist critics, in their quest to question origins, tried to locate the discourses of patriarchy and pointed how dominant knowledge systems gradually promoted a male-dominated society which was repressive towards the female gender and hindered productivity and creative possibility. A major voice is Elaine Showalter who in her essay *Towards A Feminist Poetics* (1979) analyses feminist criticism from varied perspectives. As we finish reading this unit, we shall learn that Showalter mostly concentrates on five dominant areas; namely, woman as reader, woman as writer, feminist critique and its problems, aims of gynocritics, and finally the three phases that the history of women's literature can be divided into, the feminine, the feminist, and the female stage.

12.3 ELAINE SHOWALTER: LIFE AND WORKS

Elaine Showalter (1941-) is an American feminist literary critic who is best known for her works on 19th century British and American female writers. She is also known for being one of the original pro-pounders of feminist literary criticism in United States Academia and is responsible for developing the concept of 'gynocritics' which, in simple terms, describes the study of women as writers.

Born in Boston in the state of Massachusetts, Showalter faced an era when women were hard-pressed for employment. However, she pursued a career in academia and earned her degrees and a Ph.D. which led to her first academic appointment at Douglas College and her subsequent work in feminist literature. Through her intensive reading and knowledge, she observed that women did not figure prominently in literary history, which was dominated by man. Hence, throughout her life she spent much of her time and career remedying this error through her studies and research, apart from encouraging other female writers to write. *A Jury Of Her Peers: American Women Writers From Anne Bradstreet to Annie Proulx* was the first comprehensive book at the tradition of women writers and its history. Another remarkable work was *A Literature of Their Own* (1980) which was extremely influential in the study of feminist literature and uncovered a previously unknown area of literary study which was a long but forgotten tradition of women writers in England.

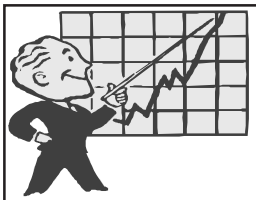
Many of her works were groundbreaking in the examination and analysis of feminist literature such as her essay *Towards a Feminist Poetics* which uses the term poetics within the context of structuralism of the 1970s, a dominant form of literary theory during that era. In this context, poetics is a systematic semi-scientific account of how literature works. It refers to both poetry and any form of comprehensive theory. Using the term in her title, she indirectly pointed out how much of poetics marginalized women and a feminist literary tradition.

Similarly, in another critical work *These Modern Women: Autobiographical Essays from the Twenties* she examines the lives of

feminine authors. Her work in *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature, and Theory* (1985) and *The Speaking Of Gender* (1989) reimagined feminist theory for a whole generation of women writers. She also wrote on the cultural history of the psychiatric treatment of women in her book work *The Female Malady: Women, Madness, and English Culture, 1830-1980* (1985) in which she examines the influence of the male perception and culture on how an average woman should behave, subsequently defining insanity in females and its treatment, according to the dominant cultural discourse.

By the 1990s, she analysed British literary history with *Sexual Anarchy: Gender at Culture at the Fin de Siècle* (1990) which describes the history of the sexes, its context, themes, and problems with a fight for pre-eminence and identity at the fin de siècle (turn of the century) as well as *Daughters of Decadence: Women Writers of the Fin De Siècle*, a collection of stories from the turn of the century with female writers openly expressing non-patriarchal themes such a female sexuality, marital discontent and feminist protest which shocked traditional Victorian critics, and hence, it was not popular among the common masses. Her latest works include *Hystories: Hysterical Epidemics and Modern Media* (1997), and *Inventing Herself: Claiming a Feminist Intellectual Heritage* (2001).

Till date, Showalter has been a controversial figure both in the field of literature and television for her non-conformist views and ideas. Apart from many accolades, she has also been awarded the *Truman Capote Award for Literary Criticism,* which is the biggest annual cash prize for literary criticism in the English language. Showalter was also chair of the judges for the prestigious British literary award, the Man Booker International Prize, in the year 2007.



"We need literary history, critical judgments, even a literary canon as a necessary step towards doing the fullest justice towards women's writing." Elaine Showalter in *A Jury Of Her Peers: American Women Writers from Anne Bradstreet To Annie Proulx.*

CHECK YOR PROGRESS

Q 1: Name some of the early feminist critics along with their noteworthy works.

Q 2: Which moments of world history are the noteworthy markers of the past?

Q 3: In their quest to question patriarchy, what did the feminist critics try to locate?

Q 4: What do you understand by the women's suffrage movement and the feminist movement?

Q 5: What do you mean by 'gynocritics' in simple terms?

Q 6: What do you understand by the term 'poetics' within the context of literary theory?

Q 7: What are some of the significant works of Elaine Showalter?

Q 8: Elaine Showalter is the recipient of which major award?

12.4 READING THE TEXT: TOWARDS A FEMINST POETICS"

Elaine Showalter's *Towards a Feminist Poetics* is constructed from a comprehensive study of women's writing informed by the female literary past. In this influential essay, Showalter traces a trail of modern, i.e., mid 19th to 20th century, feminist theory and analyses feminist criticism from diverse perspectives. She mainly concentrates on five dominant areas; namely, woman as the reader, woman as a writer, feminist critique and its problems, aims of gynocritics, and finally, the three phases that the history of women's literature can be divided into, the feminine, the feminist, and the female stage.

According to her, feminist criticism can be divided into two distinct branches. She terms the first variety of feminism as one that studies 'woman as reader' which she calls 'feminist critique.' To quote Showalter, "Feminist criticism can be divided into two distinct varieties. The first type is concerned with *woman as the reader* - with woman as the consumer of male-produced literature and with the way in which the hypothesis of a female reader changes our apprehension of a given text, awakening us to the significance of its sexual code. I shall call this kind of analysis the *feminist critique*, and like other kinds of critique, it is a historically grounded inquiry which probes the ideological assumptions of literary phenomena." (216)

In this first variety of feminism, which she calls feminist critique, women as a reader studies the text written by men or male writers. According to her, instead of directly taking what is given to them by the

patriarch, women can instead start questioning the origins and thereby change the established idea of a text. This critique is complicated and needs more profound knowledge by women. She goes on stating on the subject of this feminist critique which includes images and stereotypes of women in literature. It also looks into omissions and how women have been misrepresented in criticisms. Finally, it looks into the fissures and gaps in literary history constructed by men. It also questions the exploitation of female audience in films and consumer products. A parallel view expressed by Showalter, in her introduction to *The Vintage Book Of American Woman Writers* states, "the main reason women do not figure in American literary history is because they have not been the ones to write it." (Vintage, 2011)

The second type of feminist criticism, as Showalter states analyses 'woman as a writer', where meanings from texts are produced by woman with the themes, history, and structures of literature written by women. She named the second variety after the French term *la gynocritic*, and called it 'gynocritics'. In simple terms, it deals with literature written by women, in every aspect, or in other words, it is the study of women as writers. Critic M. H. Abrams pertinently defines 'gynocriticism' as 'a criticism which concerns itself with developing a specifically female framework for dealing with works written by women, in all aspects of their productions, motivation, analysis, and interpretation, and all literary forms including journals and letters.' (Abrams, 102)

The primary subjects, according to Showalter, include the psychodynamics of female creativity, the varied aspects of female language and the problems related to it, the diverse paths of a female literary career, both individual and collective, literary history and finally the study of female writers and their works. For Showalter, 'women as writer' or 'gynocritics' is better than 'women as reader' or 'feminist critiques'. She points out the problems of the feminist critique since it is basically male-oriented and thereby renders what women have felt and experienced as unimportant. It concentrates on what men think rather than what women should be. The biggest drawback of this critique is a tendency to naturalise female victimisation by making it the obsessive topic of discussion.

Gynocritics, on the other hand, constructs a female framework analysing women's literature wherein they develop new models based on the female experience. To quote Showalter, 'gynocritics begins at the point when we free ourselves from the linear absolutes of male literary history, stop trying to fit women between the lines of male tradition and focus instead of nearly visible world of female culture.'(217) Reconstructing the female literary past, rediscovering the hundreds of women poets and novelist whose work has been reduced to oblivion by time and thereby establishing continuity of the female tradition is the first step before analysing the aspects of how the literature of women would be different and magnanimous.

Showalter talks about locating the unique female patterns and phrases in the evolution of female tradition, where one has to go beyond the famous women writers such as Jane Austen, the Brontes, and George Eliot, among others. Here, as mentioned, Showalter uses the term 'poetics' in the title, within the context of structuralism of the 1970s, a dominant form of literary theory during that era. In this context, poetics is a systematic semi-scientific account of how literature works and using the term in her title, she indirectly pointed out how much of poetics marginalized women and a feminist literary tradition. Showalter realises that the dependence on male literature needs to discarded for the gynocritics to thrive and construct a feminist poetics.

Showalter thereafter divided the history of women's literature into three stages, namely 'the feminine', 'the feminist' and 'the female' stage. The first phase or the feminine phase dates from 1840 to 1880 where women writers wrote in a way very similar to men, imitating the man's style of writing and perception. The women writer's perception of themselves and of other women were based on the popular discourse dominated by patriarchy. The female nature was defined by man. They looked up to the male writers and tried to follow them. Many women writers tried to conform by taking up male pseudonyms instead of writing under their own names. This popular practice, which became a national characteristic of English women writers, pointed out the inferiority complex in their minds and the lack of confidence. Showalter thereafter states 'the feminist content of

feminine art is typically oblique, displaced, ironic and subversive: One has to read it between the lines, in the missed possibilities of the text.'(217)

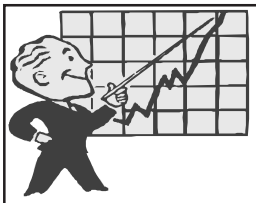
The second phase or the feminist phase, dating from 1880 to 1920, or the winning of the vote by women marks the efforts put in the women suffragette movement. The women writers, during this stage started becoming more expressive with their emotions and feelings, and began writing in a style not conforming to male writers. The suffering and pain of women in a patriarchal society came to be represented in their writings. The medium of literature became a voice to question male hegemonic discourses and their writings became a mode of protest to break down the system of patriarchy gradually. To quote Showalter, 'In the feminist phase, from about 1880 to 1920, or the winning of the vote, women are historically unable to reject the accommodating postures of feminity and to use literature to dramatise the ordeals of wronged womanhood.' (217)

Finally, from the 1920s to the present marks the commencement of the third phase which she called 'the female' phase. A marked difference is the rejection of imitation to male forms of writing (feminine phase) along with rejecting the form of protest (feminist phase). To participate in the literary process, women depended on their own experiences. Writers such as Virginia Woolf, Dorothy Richardson started identifying the uniqueness of female experience and its vast difference from the male writers. Art and literature, forms and techniques became the central point of interest and analysis.

Showalter advocates this third phase or the female phase since it leads to self-discovery and autonomy. She states, "women reject both imitation and protest–to forms of dependence–and turn instead to female experience as the source an autonomous extended the feminist analysis of cultural forms and techniques of literature" (218). This phase refers to a wide range of experiences, which is varied and diversified.

Thus, to conclude, Showalter's views on feminist poetics involves a re-reading of women's writing of the past, embracing the present writings by women and leading a path for the future generation of female writers. It is provocative as well as inspirational, outrageous as well as beckoning, all

the while sustaining for radically female-cantered literature and supporting the formulation of a women's poetics.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 9: What are the two varieties of feminist criticism?

Q 10: What do you understand by 'Feminist Critique'?

Q 11: Define 'Gynocriticism'.

Q 12: What are the three stages that the history of women's writing can be divided into?

Q 13: Showalter advocates which stage as the best stage and why?

Q 14: How can one formulate a women's poetics?

12.5 IMPORTANT ISSUES RAISED AND THEIR SIGNIFICANCE IN LITERARY STUDIES

Gynocriticism:

Elaine Showalter's major contribution to the field of literary criticism is the concept of 'Gynocriticism.' The main concern of 'gynocritics' can be subdivided into three fundamental aspects. First, to identify the subject matters in literature written by women which are distinctively feminine. It includes the domestic world, childbirth and nurture, emotional relationships and sentiments which form a significant aspect of female nature, among others.

Women's writing has been characterised as having attributes such as being concerned with the 'details' and the 'diary', categorizations that Rebecca Hogan interrogates in "Engendered Autobiographies: The Diary as a Feminine Form." These are outcomes of women's confinement to the personal sphere of the home, wherein the 'details' being referred to are the everyday activities deemed small, insignificant and mundane by the masculine public sphere, and the 'diary' is the only space (literate) women found a voice and medium of expression, because even in the home, their identity was defined by their socio-cultural gender roles. Needless to say, the significance of the details and the diary has been severely undermined in the literary canon as having little value.

The second aspect involves tracing the female literary tradition and the history behind it. It includes looking back at the female writers of the past and connecting them to the present lot of female writers and subsequently providing role models and examples to the future generation of women writers. The third aspect of 'gynocritics' is uncovering or stressing the uniqueness of the feminine mode of the experience of writing. This does away with the earlier intention of woman to imitate male writers or protesting against them. This led to the female writers to embrace literature as art, without competing with their male counterparts, thereby leading to their true emancipation as 'female' writers.

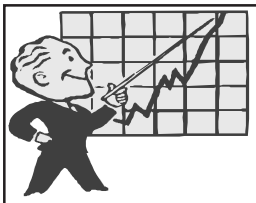
Since the feminine way of writing is very different from man due to the difference in experiences, perceptions, and identities, one can examine the genre of autobiography writing to draw on the narrative. For a woman, the medium of autobiography writing is often a means to survive the traumas of childbirth, illness, deaths of spouses and children, loss of cultural identity and personal regard, fear of loss of beauty, while the narrative is their struggle to find a voice to express. She cannot experience herself as an entirely separate identity as she is aware of the fact that she is being defined as a woman whose identity has been pre-determined by the dominant male culture. While on the other hand, male autobiographies enforce unity and identity across time by reconstructing the ego as a safeguard against disintegration, and they seldom admit their internal fears and insecurities, hesitations and ruptures, only to glide smoothly over gaps in memory and blind spots. The basic masculine self is separate and not connected to the world.

A seminal work identifying critical differences between men's and women's autobiographies was *Women's Autobiographies: Essays in Criticism,* edited by Estelle C. Jelinek, in which she writes that men set themselves apart as "success stories and histories of their era" (Jelinek, 10) focusing on their professional lives, whereas women emphasize personal and domestic details as well as their connections to people in their lives. Further, she says men "idealize their lives or cast themselves into heroic moulds to project their universal import," (Jelinek, 14) women, on the other hand, seek to find validation, "sifting through their lives for

explanation and understanding" (Jelinek 15). And, while men's narratives are characterized by linearity, harmony and orderliness, women's stories are irregular, disconnected and fragmentary. In her essay, "In the Cultural Hall of Mirrors: Issue of Gender Genre Incompatibility of Women's Autobiography" (1998), Dr. Ranjana Harish contends how the restrictive notion of the autobiography being about the centrally located isolated self has obscured the significance of women's autobiographical writing as well as that of other marginalized people. A broadening of what is understood as an autobiography, then, has been necessary to make it more inclusive of voices that do not find themselves at the centre of their own narrative.

Thematically, women's writing has often been identified as being concerned with the personal and private, rather than the public and the political–more so, in the case of autobiographies. In *Women's Consciousness, Man's World* (1978) Sheila Rowbotham writes, a woman defines herself as belonging to a collective that has been assigned a role by the dominant masculine culture. Her journey is that of a dual consciousness–one of the self that is defined by culture, and the other is of that what she creates for herself apart from cultural prescription (Rowbotham 31). Theorising on women's autobiographies, Mary G. Mason in her essay "The Other Voice" argued that it is women's status as the alternative or Other that informs their identity as relational rather than individuating, "The self-discovery of the female identity seems to acknowledge the real presence and recognition of another consciousness, and the disclosure of the female self is linked to the identification of some 'other'" (Mason 210).

This is the narrative of just one genre namely the autobiography and similar narratives can be drawn in the genre of poetry, fiction, drama, literary theory, among others.



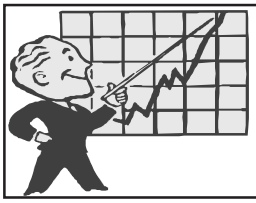
CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 15: Which concept is Showalter's most noteworthy contribution to the field of literary theory?

Q 16: What are the three aspects of 'Gynocriticism'?

12.6 RECEPTION OF SHOWALTER

Elaine Showalter has been appreciated in various ways. Josephine Donovan in *Towards a Women's Poetics* (1984) named Elaine Showalter as one of the leading feminist critics who led the way towards formulating a women's poetics calling 'Gynocritics' as the next phase of feminist criticism. Toril Moi, in her work *Sexual/Textual Politics* (1985), described Showalters views as limited and essentialist as she believed that there is no fundamental female self. She set the stage for a broader debate by suggesting that a female-oriented literary canon or poetics would never be able to represent all the women writers because tradition differs on the basis of many factors including class, sexuality and ethnicity.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 17: How was Showalter's work received both positively and negatively?



12.7 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we have learnt about the women's suffrage movement and the feminist movement. We have learnt that Showalter is a powerful voice in the feminist movement. In this essay we have discussed in this unit, Showalter analyses feminist criticism from varied perspectives and she mainly concentrates on five dominant areas, namely—woman as reader, woman as writer, feminist critique and its problems, aims of gynocritics, and finally the three phases that the history of women's literature can be divided into, the feminine, the feminist, and the female stage. During the "feminine" phase (1840-80) of feminism, women imitated the dominant tradition in writing. During the "feminist" phase (1880-1920) of feminism, women were increasingly focused on exposing hatred for woman in male-authored texts and pressed on equal rights along with protested against male hegemonic discourses. During the "female" phase (1920-present) of feminism, women focused on women's texts and women as a balanced

individual capable of higher feats. Thus, to conclude Showalter's views on feminist poetics involves a re-reading of women's writing of the past, embracing the present writings by women and leading a path for the future generation of female writers. It is provocative as well as inspirational and supports the formulation of a woman's poetics.



12.8 FURTHER READING

Abrams, M. H, Geoffrey Galt Harpham. (2011). *A Handbook of Literary Terms*. Delhi: Cengage Learning.

Donovan, Josephine. (1984). "Toward a Women's Poetics." *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, Vol 3, No. 1/2, pp. 99–110. *JSTOR*, JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/463827.

Evans, Sara. (1980). *Personal Politics: The Roots of Women's Liberation in the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left.* New York: Vintage Books.

Neumann, Birgit, et al., (Eds.) (2008). *Narrative and Identity: Theoretical Approaches and Critical Analyses*. Trier: WVT.

Newton, K. M. (Ed.). (1997). "Elaine Showalter: Towards a Feminist Poetics.*" Twentieth Century Literary Theory.* Palgrave, London.



12.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: Mary Wollstonecraft (*A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, 1792)… …John Stuart Mill (*The Subjection of Women*, 1869)… …Virginia Woolf (*A Room of One's Own*)… …Simone de Beauvoir (*The Second Sex*, 1949)… …Elaine Showalter (*A Literature Of Their Own: British Women Novelist From Bronte To Lessing* (1977)… …Mary Ellmann's *Thinking About Women* (1968)… …Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* (1969), among others.

Ans to Q 2: In world history, the noteworthy markers of the past have been moments of conflict and disagreement between culturally and ideologically variant groups.

Ans to Q 3: The feminist critics, in their quest to question origins, tried to locate the discourses of patriarchy… …pointed how dominant knowledge systems gradually promoted a male-dominated society… …hindered productivity and creative possibility of the women.. …a major voice is *Towards A Feminist Poetics* by Elaine Showalter.

Ans to Q 4: The women's suffrage movement was an influential movement of the 19th century… …women fought for the right to vote…. …followed by the feminist movement of the 20th century which called for equality in gender… …changes in political and economic emancipation of women… …paved the way for various women's organisations to spread awareness, and demand equal wages and legal rights… …human civilization has witnessed the domination of patriarchy and the feminist joined hands to bring equality between the genders.

Ans to Q 5: 'Gynocritics', in simple terms, describes the study of women as writers.

Ans to Q 6: Showalter in her essay *Towards A Feminist Poetics* uses the term poetics within the context of structuralism of the 1970s… …poetics is a systematic semi-scientific account of how literature works…. …it refers to both poetry and any form of comprehensive theory… …Showalter indirectly pointed out how much of poetics marginalized women and a female literary tradition.

Ans to Q 7: Some of Showalter's major works are *A Jury Of Her Peers: American Women Writers From Anne Bradstreet to Annie Proulx, A Literature of Their Own* (1980), *Towards A Feminist Poetics (1979), These Modern Women: Autobiographical Essays From The Twenties, The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature, and Theory(1985)*, The *Speaking Of Gender (1989)*, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness, and English Culture, 1830-1980(1985)*, *Sexual Anarchy: Gender at Culture at the Fin de Siècle(1990), Daughters Of Decadence: Women Writers of the Fin De Siècle*, *Hystories: Hysterical Epidemics and Modern Media* (1997), and *Inventing Herself: Claiming a Feminist Intellectual Heritage*(2001), among others.

Ans to Q 8: Elaine Showalter has been awarded the Truman Capote Award for Literary Criticism, which is the biggest annual cash prize for literary criticism in the English language.

Ans to Q 9: Showalter terms the first variety of feminism as one that studies 'woman as reader' which she calls 'feminist critique' and terms the second variety of feminism as one that studies 'woman as writer' which she calls 'gynocritic'.

Ans to Q 10: Feminist critique or women as a reader, studies the text written by men or male writers… …instead of directly taking what is given to them by the patriarch, women can instead start questioning the origins and thereby change the established idea of a text.

Ans to Q 11: Gynocritic or 'woman as a writer' analyses where meanings from texts are produced by woman with the themes, history, and structures of literature written by women.

Ans to Q 12: The three phases that the history of women's literature can be divided into are the feminine, the feminist, and the female stage.

Ans to Q 13: Showalter advocates the third phase or the female phase since it leads to self-discovery and autonomy… …instead of imitating man (feminine) or protesting against them (feminist), women focus on women's texts and women as a balanced individual capable of higher feats.

Ans to Q 14: By involving in a rereading of women's writing of the past, embracing the present writings by women and leading a path for the future generation of female writers.

Ans to Q 15: Gynocriticism.

Ans to Q 16: First, to identify the subject matters in literature written by women which are distinctively feminine… …second aspect involves tracing the female literary tradition and the history behind it, and the third aspect of 'gynocritics' is uncovering or stressing on the uniqueness of the feminine mode of the experience of writing.

Ans to Q 17: It was received positively by Josephine Donovan in *Towards a Women's Poetics* (1984) and was criticized by Toril Moi in her work *Sexual/Textual Politics* (1985).



12.10 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: What does Elaine Showalter mean by the term 'poetics' in her essay "Towards a Feminist Poetics"?

Q 2: What do you understand by the term 'Gynocriticism'? Elaborate.

Q 3: Discuss the three phases of feminism in detail.

Q 4: Analyze 'Feminist Critique' as opposed to 'Gynocritic'.

Q 5: Assess the significance of Elaine Showalter in feminist literary criticism.

Q 6: What do you understand by the terms 'poetics' and 'feminist poetics' within the context of literary theory?

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UNIT 13: GAYATRI CHAKRAVORTY SPIVAK: *CAN THE SUBALTERN SPEAK?*

UNIT STRUCTURE

13.1 Learning Objectives

13.2 Introduction

13.3 Gayatri Chakarvorty Spivak: The Critic

13.4 Reading the text: "Can the Subaltern Speak"

13.4.1 Major Themes

13.4.2 Style and Language

13.5 Critical Reception

13.6 Let us Sum up

13.7 Further Reading

13.8 Answers to Check Our Progress (Hints Only)

13.9 Possible Questions

13.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- gain an idea on the life and literary contributions of Gayatri C. Spivak
- explain the ideas contained in the essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?"
- discuss the major themes emerging from the text of the essay
- analyse the style and language employed in the essay
- discuss the critical reception of the essay
- appreciate the core ideas that the essay has to offer

13.2 INTRODUCTION

The present unit takes up the essay titled "Can the Subaltern Speak?" which is considered a seminal work by Gayatri Spivak, particularly with reference to postcolonial and subaltern studies. Before we delve into the textual details of the prescribed essay, let us gain a brief idea on the life and scholarly contributions of this leading academician, writer and translator,

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak who is also an award-winning critic with an international repute for her scholarly contributions worldwide.

13.3 GAYATRI CHAKARVORTY SPIVAK: THE CRITIC

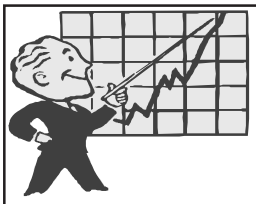
Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak was born in 24 February 1942 in Calcutta where she grew up and began her formal education. Spivak studied at the prestigious Presidency College in Calcutta graduating in the year 1959 before deciding to pursue her higher studies at the University of Cambridge, eventually completing her doctoral studies at Cornell University in 1967. After completing her studies, she took up teaching English and Comparative Studies across various universities such as University of Iowa, University of Texas, University of Pittsburgh, University of Pennsylvania and also at Emory University, Atlanta Georgia as the Longstreet Professor of English. Spivak continues to teach at Columbia University as University Professor at present, having joined there as the Avalon Foundation Professor in Humanities in the year 1991.

Spivak who is a name to reckon with in the academic world, has made a mark for herself through the course of her proficient academic career. She has to her credit many scholarly works namely,

Myself I Must Remake (1974),
Of Grammatology (1976),
In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics (1987),
The Post-Colonial Critic (1990),
Thinking Academic Freedom in Gendered Post-Coloniality (1992),
Outside in the Teaching Machine (1993),
The Spivak Reader (1995),
A Critique of Postcolonial Reason (1999),
Death of a Discipline (2003),
Other Asias (2008),
An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization (2012), and
Readings (2014).

Also, she has translated several works by the leading writer and activist, Mahaswata Devi from Bengali to English, namely *Imaginary Maps* (1994), *Breast Stories* (1997), *Old Women* (1999) and *Chotti Munda and His Arrow* (2002). Besides, she has also translated a story by writer, Ramproshad Sen titled *Song for Kali: A Cycle* (2000) with an introduction to his work. Her forthcoming work is titled *Red Thread* and another work titled *Master Discourse, Native Informant*. Apart from her works as a translator, she also happens to be one of the founding members of the Institute for Comparative Literature and Society.

Spivak had received the Kyoto Prize in Arts and Philosophy in the year 2012 and was honored the Padma Bhushan in the year 2013. She had also received the Guggenheim fellowship and conferred with honorary doctorates from a total of eleven academic institutions and Universities till date. Moreover, she had also received recognition for her translation work from the Sahitya Akademi. Spivak is dedicated to the cause of educating the disadvantaged sections of the society and is associated with founding the Pares Chandra and Sivani Chakravorty Memorial Foundation for Rural Education. Her contributions as a leading critic and literary theorist has provided us today with newer and much necessary perspectives on Marxism, feminism and the subaltern.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: When and where was Gayatri Chakraborty Spivak born?

Q 2: Where did Spivak begin and complete her formal education?

Q 3: Name some of the major works by Gayatri Chakraborty Spivak.

Q 4: Mention the works by Mahaswata Devi, which were translated by Spivak.

Q 5: When was Spivak honoured the Kyoto Prize and the Padma Bhushan?

13.4 READING THE TEXT: "CAN THE SUBALTERN SPEAK"

In this subsection, let us attempt at grasping some of the important ideas that are highlighted in Spivak's essay, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" In the opening lines of the text, Spivak makes a powerful statement thus, "Some of the most radical criticism coming out of the West today is the result of an interested desire to conserve the subject of the West, or the West as Subject" (24). This refers to the fact that the Western thinkers, intellectuals and critics tend to focus and draw more attention on their own issues because of which their concerns are focused as primary. This in a way brushes aside and even denies the equal importance that is due to the Eastern thinkers and the equally important issues that concern the East.

Spivak opines that even the ideas held by the 'postmodernists' and 'deconstructionists' are debatable owing to some of the inherent political contradictions therein. She mentions that the idea of plurality with regard to everything that is upheld by both these intellectual schools of thought only provides an "illusion" that the consideration of plurality or multiplicity of thought or perspective undermines subjective sovereignty, although it is not so. Undoubtedly, the history of Europe is dictated by the law of the land, its political economy and the ideology of the West. However, the West pretends that it is not limited by boundaries or has no such "geo-political determinations" (24) even as it is seen to clearly occupy the position of the Subject.

Spivak then highlights the covert or hidden practices of the Subject; Subject that is with a capital 'S' which she opines, "belongs to the exploiter's side of the international division of labor" (24). Then with the concept of the "S/subject" we have the creation of its opposite i.e., the "Other". There is an intense amount of tension and conflict between the two and likewise among all other binary opposites such as the self and the other, colonial and the colonised, the bourgeois and the proletariat, center and marginal, majority and minority, occident and the orient among other such constructed socio-political and historical notions. This is where the aspect of power-play comes in and where one set of the binary opposite such as the self,

the colonial, the bourgeoisie, the center, the majority, the occident etc. are seen as more powerful than the opposite set i.e., the other, the colonised, the proletariat, the marginal, the minority, the orient who tend to be repressed or subdued in the larger scheme of things. To elucidate this point, Spivak writes thus, "The clearest available example of such epistemic violence is the remotely orchestrated, far-flung, and heterogeneous project to constitute the colonial subject as Other" (25). This is precisely the way in which the grand narratives of history undermine or even neglect the subaltern narratives of history, where the powerful center represses and silences the voice of the margins. Thus, she cites the reference of the French philosopher Michel Foucault who noted thus, "a whole set of knowledges that have been disqualified as inadequate to their task or insufficiency elaborated: naïve knowledges, located low down on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity" (25).

Spivak then moves on to consider the 'margins' or in her own words- "one can just as well say the silent, silenced center" (25) which encompasses the illiterate peasantry (both male and female), the tribal people, and those at the lowest strata of urban society as well, all of whom are considered as the 'proletariat'. In this regard, she critiques Michel Foucault and another major thinker by the name of Deleuze, whom she regards responsible for the "epistemic violence" (25), i.e., the imposing of Eurocentric or Westernised set of knowledge (episteme) on the Third World, thereby, establishing its superiority over the latter. This not only leaves little scope for the native knowledge(s) to find an acknowledgement but also constructs the idea of the Third World being inferior to the First World order. Thus, the learner may note that even knowledge systems are politicised in a way, for it engages or involves in power play or the tussle for power.

She speculates that if the First World or the 'developed nations' supposedly under the influence of a strict socialised capital, does open itself to receiving or hearing the collective voice of the 'oppressed Other', they would perhaps gain an insight into their conditions or contexts, as well. It is important to take into account the fact that it is always important to consider and weigh all sides of a matter, the absence of which can weaken one's analysis and make it all one-sided. This is where the question arises

which is also forms the core of the text- on whether the subaltern can speak. She thus, highlights the term 'subaltern' itself, which in other words refers the Third World or the 'developing nations'.

Spivak makes the first proposition that there is a counteractive group of intellectuals emerging from the space of the Third World, stating thus, "the phased development of the subaltern is complicated by the imperialist project-is confronted by a collective of intellectuals who may be called the 'Subaltern Studies' group". They must ask, "Can the subaltern speak?" (25). We shall discuss more about the significance of this group in the next subsection with regard to the emerging themes of the text. Basically, the point that Spivak tries to make is that taken as a whole, the Subaltern Group is inclined in a major way to re-examine Indian colonial historiography in a new light and adopt newer insights and perspectives on the same rather than stick to the already given set of established perspectives. She suggests that this new ways of studying historiography draws one's attention to the oft-forgotten peasant uprisings or "insurgencies" (25) also citing the eminent historian and critic Ranajit Guha thus, "The historiography of Indian nationalism has for long time been dominated by elitism-colonialist elitism and bourgeois-nationalist elitism…shar[ing] the prejudice that the making of the Indian nation and the development of the consciousness-nationalism which confirmed this process were exclusively or predominantly elite achievements. In the colonialist and neo-colonialist historiographies these achievements are credited to British colonial rulers, administrators policies, institutions, and culture, in the nationalist and neo-nationalist writings- to Indian elite personalities, institutions, activities and ideas" (26).

Again, there is a presence of 'internal-politics' or what Guha terms as "the politics of the people" (26) which operates covertly between the indigenous elite and the poor in the Indian context, even as the colonial influence is already in play. Further, Ranajit Guha also notes that there is a "dynamic stratification grid" (26) in which the dominating macro-structural framework or authority in power, the people and the 'buffer group', occupies a 'liminal' space i.e., condition of hanging 'in-between' these two groups which Derrida referred to as 'antre'. Spivak mentions the divisions or stratifications thus, the first two groups defining the elite section-

1. Dominant foreign groups
2. Dominant indigenous groups on the all-India level.
3. Dominant indigenous groups at the regional and local levels.
4. The terms 'people' and 'subaltern classes' [are] used as synonymous throughout [Guha's definition]. The social groups and elements included in this category represent the demographic difference between the total Indian population and all those whom we have described as the 'elite'. (26)

Spivak in examining how these indigenous categories tend to be at loggerheads notes that though all the categories were ideally considered as the 'subaltern', depending on the context and conditions, there was much of a power conflict, even within themselves. Thus, she cites the significant purpose and role of research which is- "to investigate, identify and measure the *specific* nature and degree of the deviation of [the] elements [constituting item 3 mentioned above] from the ideal and situate it historically. 'Investigate, identify, and measure the specific': a program could hardly be more essentialist and taxonomic" (27). Further, she states thus, "In subaltern studies, because of the violence of imperialist, epistemic, social, and disciplinary inscription, a project understood in essentialist terms must have traffic in a radical textual practice of differences" (27).

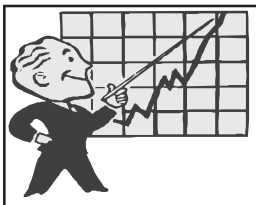
The subaltern is defined as 'different' from the elite; and their academic pursuits or research does focus on this aspect. Spivak notes that both at the local and the regional level, the indigenous have mostly acted in the interests of the socially dominating groups instead of acting in their own interests and standing up for themselves. Therefore, the core identity of the same indigenous groups is their 'difference' and there is possibly no reason as to why they cannot speak and write themselves in the larger narrative of the nation. Thus, the question that emerges is, in the words of Spivak- "How can we touch the consciousness of the people even as we investigate their politics? With what voice-consciousness can the subaltern speak?" (27)

The main objective for the Subaltern Group is to revisit the development of consciousness of the Indian nation. Spivak then turns to the following question that further emerges from her discussion focusing

on the "consciousness of the subaltern" (28). This highlights the necessity of taking into account the issues and aspects of the subaltern that often go neglected and hardly receive any importance in the larger narrative of the nation. These voices cannot be drowned out by the continuous "insurgency" that have suppressed them in every way, misrepresenting their protests as mere "utterances" (28). For this reason, a subaltern like the 'peasant' is considered "a pointer to an irretrievable consciousness" (28) i.e., the irretrievable consciousness of the larger masses.

Along with the Postcolonial critics, there are Feminist critics as well who take up certain strands of thought that draw from the ideas of the deconstructionists and subaltern studies. The point that is made here is that irrespective of the intellectual stance that they take, it will be tremendously difficult for the subject to voice themselves and counter the oppressive forces if they catergorise or continue to be separated further by race, gender, class, creed and other such differences as these are bound to create internal conflicts. These differences have to be done away with and in fact, these categories which are in reality only social constructions has to be broken down if the marginalized is to emerge from the shadows, whether it is in relation to the colonised, the peasant or women subjects.

Until and unless the existence of such social constructions are broken down they will continue to be reproduced and reinforced in every way. For an instance, the construction of gender reinforces and reproduces male dominance; if such social construction is broken down, it will definitely break down the dominant male ideology. The problems confronted by women in the margins are acute and Spivak opines that if the subaltern or the marginalised as a whole cannot speak up for itself, then one can imagine how difficult it will be for the female or women subaltern. Thus, she states- "If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow…" (28). Spivak thus, ends her essay on this note, perhaps, leaving more scope to further probe into these relevant aspects that has taken the academia by storm.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 6: Mention some of the socially constructed binary opposites.

Q 7: When does the aspect of power come into play?

Q 8: Who according to Spivak comprise the proletariat?

Q 9: What does Spivak mean by the term "epistemic violence" in her essay?

Q10: Name the counteractive group emerging from the space of the Third World.

13.4.1 Major Themes

Some of the major themes that are seen to emerge from the text of the essay shall be discussed in this subsection. It is important to note that the learner is also advised to read through the main text of the prescribed essay followed by the explanation of the text provided in the unit in order to form his or her own analysis of any other emergent themes, apart from the ones discussed below.

The Subaltern or the Marginalised:

In her essay, Spivak highlights some of the pertinent issues regarding capitalism and colonialism, functions of Western ideology and Western epistemic violence, the constructions of binaries and the politics defining it and most importantly, the discourses of the Third World and the subaltern or the marginalised. The term 'subaltern' refers to subordination or in other words those lower in rank or position, as was earlier used in reference to official positions in the British army. The Subaltern as already discussed refers to the marginalised sections of a society, those who are considered to be at the margins or the periphery of a society, given their supposedly weak and inferior position in relation to those who are assumed to be powerful and superior. The marginalised are taken for granted and the dominant assume a dominant position at the center or mainstream of a society as is highlighted in the text of the essay.

The Subaltern group comprises those who have been historically silenced, those groups who have always been denied social welfare and those people who have always been the victims of systemic oppression. This particular section of the society, comprising largely the peasants and labourers, the tribal people and indigenous communities and particularly 'women' have suffered oppression for far too long, being socially disadvantaged and crippled with alienation from their rights and the very land that they have helped to build. Therefore, 'justice' is a must for those at the margins and Subaltern Studies is a start that takes up these discourses upfront and creates a space for dialogue from the margins. In this regard, Spivak herself notes that the main objective of the Subaltern Group is to 'revisit the development of consciousness of the Indian nation'.

Social Construction:

If we take up the aspect of 'social construction', which is at the root of the discourse, Spivak discusses how the categories of identities, binary opposites and such convenient divisions are in reality mere social constructions. This explains the ways in which the larger social consciousness tends to shape up, where these social constructs tend to be internalized and then, reinforced into common practice. Through the perspective of the deconstructionists, Spivak opines that it is important to identify the politics behind the formation of social constructs and to debunk or break down the same in order to end the hegemony or domination of the powerful. She is also critical of the Marxists broadly generalizing the issues of the subaltern group as she takes into account the fact that there may be multiple issues, aspects and conditions within the subaltern group itself that needs to be addressed or expressed, by them alone. The subaltern need to re-write their own narratives, newly narrate their own positions and re-engage in highlighting their own historical struggles instead of accepting the grand narratives, as well as, internalising the social constructs established by the mainstream. In the Indian context, Indian histories and historiographies must take into account the marginal histories of the subaltern instead of

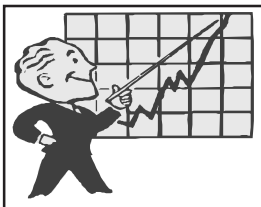
highlighting the larger narratives of the nation. Also, the rigid social constructs and the politics of power to suppress those who are assumed as 'weak' needs to be confronted by those at the margins or the periphery. Further, the dominance of one group over the other within the subaltern group itself needs to be broken down before they can unite in their stand against political hegemony and the long historical injustice of being pushed to the social margins, of being othered and neglected in every way. In so many ways then, Spivak addresses the ground realities of truth construction, the maze of socio-political structures, the insidious ways in which such politics of identity operate and most importantly, the importance of human rights.



LET US KNOW

Postcolonial Studies: In simple terms, it is an area of study, which critically examines the concerns of 'colonialism' and 'imperialism' in a social structure, as well as, the socio-political underpinnings that give rise to these processes. Some of the important names associated with postcolonial studies are namely, Edward Said, Frantz Fanon, Derek Gregory, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Homie Bhabha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak herself among many other noted scholars.

Subaltern Studies: The term 'subaltern' was first used by Antonio Gramsci, an Italian Marxist. Subaltern Studies had first emerged in the 1980s, comprising several South Asian scholars highlighting the issues and aspects of the subaltern or the marginalised. These scholars came to be known as the Subaltern Studies Group (SSG) or Subaltern Studies Collective that focused on narratives from the margins and examined 'history from below'. Some of the leading names associated with the group are scholars and intellectuals namely, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Gayatri Chakraborty Spivak, Partha Chatterjee, Ranajit Guha, Sumit Sarkar and Susie Tharu among a few others.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 12: What does the term 'subaltern' refer to?

Q 13: Whom does the Subaltern Group refer to?

Q 14: What is the role that the subaltern should play with regard to their marginalised position?

Q 15: What should the Indian historians and historiographers take into account with regard to historical narratives?

Q 16: Define the term 'Postcolonial Studies'.

Q 17: Mention some of the leading names associated with the Subaltern Studies.

13.4.2 Style and Language

The critical essays and other writings of Spivak tend to stir the reader's consciousness and interest especially with regard to Subaltern Studies. Most of her intellectual writings delve on the significant discourses on postcolonialism, neocolonialism, feminism and the Subaltern. In the essay, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Spivak examines the problems of identity, ideology and injustice, as well as, the unfair positioning of the Third World together with the pertinent issues of the Third World Woman. Spivak unravels the complexities of these issues, reiterating the importance of counter discourses from the margins. Her own position as an Indian-born, Bengali, middle class, woman, academician and American resident is not separate from these major discourses that she takes up, examines, intervenes and then formulates into words.

Thus, it is only too obvious that her style of writing is rhetorical and her style of articulation is as elegant as eloquent (much as her academic lectures, also available on the internet). Her expressions are formulated in an argumentative style and her various points of argument are neat and precise. In addition, the learner may note that there are several cross references available in the text, which calls for referring to the respective scholars in the field and the

significant strands of their argument as well. With regard to her style of writing that encompasses all of these complex and inter-related issues and aspects, Seldon et. al aptly note, “And this, in turn, will affect matters of language, style and audience. If Spivak’s prose can be ungracious and convoluted, therefore, we should bear in mind the problematics of her own position and her very evident awareness of its intricacies” (235).

While attempting to read the text of the essay which is reasonably short in length, the learner will note that the language employed is neither too simplistic nor too ornate in its style of expression. Although, the language is dense at times given the complexity of the topic itself and it often appears difficult to extract its meaning in the first reading of the text, yet it is relatively easy to point out the basic arguments highlighted in her essay. Therefore, it is suggested that the learner attempts several reading of the text in order to fully comprehend the arguments and the validity of the justifications that the critic puts forth her readers.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q18: What does Spivak basically examine in her essay?

Q19: Write a few words on Spivak’s style of writing with reference to her essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?”

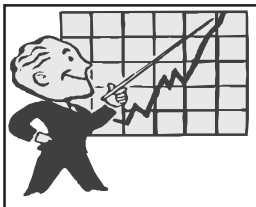
13.5 CRITICAL RECEPTION

Lodge and Wood in *Modern Criticism and Theory* (2008) provide a short entry on the contributions of Spivak as an emerging voice of the times, highlighting her central concerns that clearly defines and shapes up most of her works in the following words, “The Subaltern Studies group who published radical revisions of Asian colonial history between 1982 and 1954, owed much to Spivak and Ranajit Guha’s energy in deconstructing imperial accounts of ‘native’ rebellion and customs to allow other voices freer play” (494). Further, Selden et al. in their entry on Spivak in *A Reader’s Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory* (2007) opine thus,

"A leading postcolonial critic who closely follows the lessons of deconstruction and whose work raises once more the difficult politics of this enterprise is Gayatri Chakraborty Spivak, also translator and author of the important translator's preface to Derrida's *Of Grammatology* (1976). In addition to a defiantly unassimilated 'ethics' of deconstruction, Spivak draws, too, on Marxism and feminism, and this stringently 'anti-foundationalist', hybridized eclecticism is itself significant, since she aims not to synthesize these sources but to preserve their discontinuities- the ways they bring each other to crisis" (233).

They aptly note that following closely in the steps of Derrida, both her works and her methodology is clearly deconstructionist in nature or rather "anti-foundationalist" (233) which enquires the validity of structural systems and also examines the politics of identity. Further, if the Western 'intellectuals' are to take the side of the subaltern to speak on their behalf and in another sense if the subaltern themselves fail to take a stand for themselves, then the much needed counter-colonial discourse will not take place in the way it should.

In this regard, Spivak in her discussion on the condition of subalternity and the emerging role of the Subaltern Studies in an essay titled "Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography" (refer to *Subaltern Studies*) notes that the 'Subaltern Studies Group' significantly "offers a theory of change" (330). While examining the aspect of collective subaltern consciousness and the importance of revisiting historiography, she notes that the Subaltern Studies Group has an extensive role to play in facilitating newer perspectives and dialogues both at present and in the time to come. Thus, the essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" is considered one of the leading texts, which is widely referred to and highly regarded by academicians, critics, intellectuals and thinkers particularly engaged in this area of study.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 20: What does Seldon et al. opine with regard to the works and methodology employed by Spivak?

Q 21: What according to Spivak does the Subaltern Studies Group do?



13.6 LET US SUM UP

After going through the unit, the learner will gain an idea on the life and the scholarly contributions of the leading intellectual and postcolonial critic, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak who is internationally reputed for her work particularly in the area of Subaltern Studies. Through the discussion of the text of the essay, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" that is provided in the unit, the learner will now be able to explain, as well as, highlight the main ideas and arguments of the essay. After a thorough reading of the text and the present unit, the learner will be in a position to highlight the major themes that emerge from the essay and examine the style and language employed in the text. Moreover, the learner will be aware of the critical reception of this seminal work and thereby discuss the major aspects of the essay addressed in the unit. Therefore, it is hoped that the learner will further explore other critical texts that delve on the issues of the subaltern and those who thrive at the peripheries of the social structures. The subaltern or the marginalized are the agents of change and they need to articulate their narratives, to be heard as they certainly have a voice of their own.



13.7 FURTHER READING

Guha, Ranajit. (Ed.). (2010). *Subaltern Studies IV: Writings on South Asian History and Society*. New Delhi: OUP.

Lodge, David and Nigel Wood. (Eds.). (1988). *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader*. 2nd Edition. New Delhi: Pearson.

Selden, Raman. et al. (2007). *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory* (Fifth Edition). New Delhi: Pearson.

13.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK OUR PROGRESS (Hints Only)

Ans to Q 1: Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak was born in 24 February 1942 in Calcutta.

Ans to Q 2: Spivak studied at the prestigious Presidency College in Calcutta graduating in the year 1959 before deciding pursue her higher studies at the University of Cambridge and eventually completing her doctoral studies at Cornell University in 1967.

Ans to Q 3: *Myself I Must Remake* (1974), *Of Grammatology* (1976), *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (1987), *The Post-Colonial Critic* (1990), *Thinking Academic Freedom in Gendered Post-Coloniality* (1992), *Outside in the Teaching Machine* (1993), *The Spivak Reader* (1995), *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* (1999), *Death of a Discipline* (2003), *Other Asias* (2008), *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization* (2012) and *Readings* (2014).

Ans to Q 4: The translated works of the leading writer and activist, Mahaswata Devi from Bengali to English which were done by Spivak are namely *Imaginary Maps* (1994), *Breast Stories* (1997), *Old Women* (1999) and *Chotti Munda and His Arrow* (2002).

Ans to Q 5: Spivak had received the Kyoto Prize in Arts and Philosophy in the year 2002 and was honored the Padma Bhushan in the year 2013.

Ans to Q 6: Some of the binary opposites are such as the self and the other, colonial and the colonised, the bourgeois and the proletariat, center and marginal, majority and minority, occident and the orient among other such constructed socio-political and historical notions.

Ans to Q 7: The aspect of power-play enters when one set of the binary opposite such as the self, the colonial, the bourgeoisie, the center, the majority, the occident etc. are seen as more powerful than the opposite set i.e., the other, the colonised, the proletariat, the marginal, the minority, the orient who tend to be repressed or subdued in the larger scheme of things.

Ans to Q 8: The illiterate peasantry (both male and female), the tribal people, and those at the lowest strata of urban society as well, all of whom are considered as the 'proletariat'.

Ans to Q 9: It refers to the imposing of Eurocentric or Westernised set of knowledge (episteme) on the Third World, thereby, establishing its superiority over the latter. This not only leaves little scope for the native

knowledge(s) to find an acknowledgement but also constructs the idea of the Third World being inferior to the First World order.

Ans to Q 10: The counteractive group of intellectuals emerging from the space of the Third World is the Subaltern.

Ans to Q 12: The term 'subaltern' refers to subordination or in other words those lower in rank or position… …reference to official positions in the British army… …the Subaltern refers to the marginalized sections of a society… …given their assumed weak and inferior position in relation to the powerful and superior or dominant position of those at the center or mainstream of a society.

Ans to Q 13: The Subaltern group comprises those who have been historically silenced, those groups who have always been denied social welfare and those people who have always been the victims of systemic oppression.

Ans to Q 14: The subaltern need to re-write their own narratives, newly narrate their own positions and re-engage in highlighting their own historical struggles instead of accepting the grand narratives, as well as, internalising the social constructs established by the mainstream.

Ans to Q 15: In the Indian context, Indian historians and historiographers must take into account the marginal histories of the subaltern instead of highlighting the larger narratives of the nation.

Ans to Q 16: Examines the concerns of 'colonialism' and 'imperialism' in a social structure… …the socio-political underpinnings that give rise to these processes… … Some important names are namely, Edward Said, Frantz Fanon, Derek Gregory, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak herself among others.

Ans to Q 17: Some of the leading names associated with the group are scholars and intellectuals namely, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Gayatri Chakraborty Spivak, Partha Chatterjee, Sumit Sarkar, Susie Tharu and Ranajit Guha among a few others.

Ans to Q 18: In the essay, "Can the Subaltern Speak?", Spivak examines the problems of identity, ideology and injustice, as well as, the unfair positioning of the Third World together with the pertinent issues of the

Third World Woman. Spivak unravels the complexities of these issues, reiterating the importance of counter discourses from the margins.

Ans to Q 19: Thus, it is only too obvious that her style of writing is rhetorical and her style of articulation is as elegant as eloquent (much as her academic lectures, also available on the internet). Her expressions are formulated in an argumentative style and her various points of argument are neat and precise.

Ans to Q 20: They aptly note that following closely in the steps of Derrida, both her works and her methodology is clearly deconstructionist in nature or rather "anti-foundationalist" (233) which enquires the validity of structural systems and also examines the politics of identity.

Ans to Q 21: Spivak in her discussion on the condition of subalternity and the emerging role of the Subaltern Studies in an essay titled "Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography", notes that the 'Subaltern Studies Group' significantly "offers a theory of change" (330).



13.9 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: Write a note on the life and works of the academician, scholar and critic Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak.

Q 2: Explain the content of the essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in your own words.

Q 3: Discuss the major themes that emerge from the text of the essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?"

Q 4: Analyse the style and language employed by Gayatri Spivak in the text of her seminal essay.

Q 5: Give a critical reception of the essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in your own words.

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UNIT 14: HOMI K. BHABHA: "NARRATING THE NATION" FROM *NATION AND NARRATION*

UNIT STRUCTURE

14.1 Learning Objectives

14.2 Introduction

14.3 Homi K. Bhabha: The Critic

14.4 Reading the text: "Narrating the Nation"

14.5 Critical Reception of Bhabha

14.6 Let us Sum up

14.7 Further Reading

14.8 Answers to Check Our Progress (Hints Only)

14.9 Possible Questions

14.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- discuss the life and works of the theorist Homi Bhabha
- read "Narrating the Nation" as one of the significant essays of Bhabha
- identify the important issues raised by Bhabha in the essay
- comment on the reception of Homi Bhabha as a postcolonial critic

14.2 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, we shall discuss Homi Bhabha's essay "Narrating the Nation" which is also the Introduction to his book *Nation and Narration* (1990). This book is primarily an intervention into "essentialist" readings of nationality that attempt to define and naturalize Third World "nations" by means of the supposedly homogenous, innate, and historically continuous traditions that falsely define and ensure their subordinate status. Nations, in Bhabha's views, are "narrative" constructions that arise from the "hybrid" interaction of contending cultural constituencies. We have provided the entire short

essay in the unit for our reading. Our job shall be to jot down the important issues and ideas mentioned by Bhabha and then try to locate their significance in the Postcolonial discourse. However, as we finish reading the unit, we should be able to highlight the important issues raised by Bhabha regarding the idea of nation in the prescribed text.

14.3 HOM BHABHA: THE CRITIC

Homi K. Bhabha (1949-) is an Indian literary and cultural critic, influential theorist of postcolonial culture, and engaged advocate for the humanities. Together with Edward Said and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, he is recognised as one of the most significant contributors to Postcolonial theory.

He was born in Bombay, India, into a Parsi family. He graduated with a B. A. from *Elphinstone College*, *University of Mumbai* and an M. A., M. Phil., and *D. Phil.* in English Literature from *Christ Church, Oxford University*. After working in the Department of English at the University of Sussex for more than ten years, Bhabha received a senior fellowship at Princeton University, where he was also made Old Dominion Visiting Professor. He was also the Steinberg Visiting Professor at the University of Pennsylvania where he delivered the Richard Wright Lecture Series. At Dartmouth College, Bhabha was a faculty fellow at the School of Criticism and Theory. From 1997 to 2001, he served as Chester D. Tripp Professor in the Humanities at the University of Chicago. Then again, from 2001–02, he served as a Distinguished Visiting Professor at University College, London. He has been the Anne F. Rothenberg Professor of English and American Literature and Language at Harvard University since 2001. Bhabha is also on the Editorial Collective of the journal *Public Culture* published by Duke University Press.

The Anne F. Rothenberg Professor of English and American Literature and Language, and the Director of the Mahindra Humanities Center at *Harvard University*, Bhabha is one of the most important figures in contemporary Post-colonial studies. He is mostly known for coining many of the key terms in the field of Post-colonial theory such as *hybridity*, mimicry,

difference, and ambivalence—terms, which describe the ways in which the colonised people have, resisted the power of the coloniser, as conceived by Bhabha. In 2012, he received the *Padma Bhushan* Award from the Government of India for his contribution in the field of literature and education.

His considerable reputation is based upon two books *Nation and Narration* (1990) an edited volume and *The Location of Culture* (1994)—a collection of his own essays—many of which were published elsewhere and heavily revised. We should note that these essays are dense, richly eclectic and characterised by a style of writing that is personal. *Nations and Narration* takes its inspiration from Benedict Anderson's thesis that the nation is an 'imagined community' whose sense of identity is grounded in an imagined sense of historical community and continuity which may be quite illusory. It is also inspired by the French historian Ernest Renan's "What is a Nation", where he argues that a nation is not based on the 'purity of race', but upon a collective will to live together and a combination of memory and amnesia.

Aligned with the works of the psychoanalytic and post-structuralist thinkers, Bhabha has been a profoundly original voice in the study of colonial, postcolonial, and globalized cultures. His engagements with terms like hybridity, ambivalence and mimicry—formed the basis for postcolonial theory, besides also inspiring further works in Management Studies, Art theory, Architecture, Human rights, Development Studies, Theology, and many other unexpected fields. His works remain an essential reference for anyone interested in the hybrid cultural perspectives associated with Colonialism and Globalization. Drawing on many demanding theorists and covering a range of histories and cultures, Bhabha's work elaborates a series of concepts that capture the ways the colonized resisted the authority of the colonizer, an authority that was from the start ambivalent and anxious.



LET US KNOW

Some Important Concepts of Homi Bhabha:

Hybridity:

One of his central ideas is that of "hybridisation," which, taking up from Edward Said's work, describes the emergence of new cultural forms from multiculturalism. Instead of seeing colonialism as something locked in the past, Bhabha shows how its histories and cultures constantly intrude on the present, demanding that we transform our understanding of cross-cultural relations. His work transformed the study of colonialism by applying post-structuralist methodologies to colonial texts.

Ambivalence:

The idea of ambivalence sees culture as consisting of opposing perceptions and dimensions. Bhabha claims that this ambivalence—this duality that presents a split in the identity of the colonized other—allows for beings who are a hybrid of their own cultural identity and the colonizer's cultural identity. Ambivalence contributes to the reason why colonial power is characterized by its belatedness. Accordingly, the colonial presence remains ambivalent, split between its appearance as original and authoritative and its articulation as repetition and difference. This opens up the two dimensions of colonial discourse: that which is characterized by invention and mastery and that of displacement and fantasy.

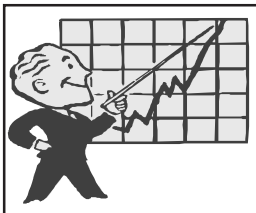
Mimicry:

Like Bhabha's concept of hybridity, mimicry is a metonym of presence. Mimicry appears when members of a colonized society imitate and take on the culture of the colonizers. Colonial mimicry comes from the colonist's desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is, as Bhabha writes, "almost the same, but not quite". Thus, mimicry is a sign of a double articulation; a strategy which appropriates the Other as it visualizes power.

Third Space:

The Third Space acts as an ambiguous area that develops when two or more individuals/cultures interact. It "challenges our sense of the

historical identity of culture as a homogenizing, unifying force, authenticated by the originary past, kept alive in the national tradition of the People". This ambivalent area of discourse, which serves as a site for the discursive conditions of enunciation, "displaces the narrative of the Western written in homogeneous, serial time."



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: Why is Homi K. Bhabha famous for?

Q 2: Name the two books on which rest Bhabha's reputation.

Q 3: Explain the terms 'Mimicry' and 'Hybridity'.

14.4 READING THE TEXT: "NARRATING THE NATION" FROM NATION AND NARRATION

We are here providing the whole essay of the prescribed text for your perusal. For you convenience, we shall italicise some of the important issues and ideas discussed by Bhabha in this text.

Nations, like narratives, lose their origins in the myths of time and only fully realize their horizons in the mind's eye. Such an image of the nation - or narration - might seem impossibly romantic and excessively metaphorical, but it is from those traditions of political thought and literary language that the nation emerges as a powerful historical idea in the west. An idea whose cultural compulsion lies in the impossible unity of the nation as a symbolic force. This is not to deny the attempt by nationalist discourses persistently to produce the idea of the nation as a continuous narrative of national progress, the narcissism of self-generation, the primeval present of the *Volk*. Nor have such political ideas been definitively superseded by those new realities of internationalism, multi-nationalism, or even 'late capitalism', once we acknowledge that the rhetoric of these global terms is most often underwritten in that grim prose of power that each nation can wield within its own sphere of influence. *What I want to emphasize in that large and liminal image of the nation with which I began is a particular*

ambivalence that haunts the idea of the nation, the language of those who write of it and the lives of those who live it. It is an ambivalence that emerges from a growing awareness that, despite the certainty with which historians speak of the 'origins' of nation as a sign of the 'modernity' of society, the cultural temporality of the nation inscribes a much more transitional social reality. Benedict Anderson, whose *Imagined Communities* significantly paved the way for this book, expresses the nation's ambivalent emergence with great clarity:

The century of the Enlightenment, of rationalist secularism, brought with it its own modern darkness. . . [Few] things were (are) suited to this end better than the idea of nation. If nation states are widely considered to be 'new' and 'historical', the nation states to which they give political expression always loom out of an immemorial past and...glide into a limitless future. What I am proposing is that Nationalism has to be understood, by aligning it not with self-consciously held political ideologies, but with large cultural systems that preceded it, out of which - as well as against which - it came into being.

The nation's 'corning into being' as a system of cultural signification, as the representation of social life rather than the discipline of social polity, emphasizes this instability of knowledge. For instance, the most interesting accounts of the national idea, whether they come from the Tory Right, the Liberal high ground, or the New Left, seem to concur on the ambivalent tension that defines the 'society' of the nation. Michael Oakeshott's 'Character of a modern European state' is perhaps the most brilliant conservative account of the equivocal nature of the modern nation. The national space is, in his view, constituted from competing dispositions of human association as *societas* (the acknowledgement of moral rules and conventions of conduct) and *universitas* (the acknowledgement of common purpose and substantive end). In the absence of their merging into a new identity, they have survived as competing dogmas -*societas cum universitate* - 'impos[ing] a particular ambivalence upon all the institutions of a modern state and a specific ambiguity upon its vocabulary of discourse. *In Hannah Arendt's view, the society of the nation in the modern world is*

'that curiously hybrid realm where private interests assume public significance' and the two realms flow unceasingly and uncertainly into each other 'like waves in the never-ending stream of the life-process itself'.' No less certain is Tom Nairn, in naming the nation 'the modern Janus', that the 'uneven development' of capitalism inscribes both progression and regression, political rationality and irrationality in the very genetic code of the nation. This is a structural fact to which there are no exceptions and 'in this sense, it is an exact (not a rhetorical) statement about nationalism to say that it is by nature ambivalent'.

It is the cultural representation of this ambivalence of modern society that is explored in this book. If the ambivalent figure of the nation is a problem of its transitional history, its conceptual indeterminacy, its wavering between vocabularies, then what effect does this have on narritives and discourses that signify a sense of 'nationness': the *heimlich* pleasures of the hearth, the *unheimlich* terror of the space or race of the Other; the comfort of social belonging, the hidden injuries of class; the customs of taste, the powers of political affiliation; the sense of social order, the sensibility of sexuality; the blindness of bureaucracy, the strait insight of institutions; the quality of justice, the common sense of injustice; the *langue* of the law and the *parole* of the people.

The emergence of the political 'rationality' of the nation as a form of narrative—textual strategies, metaphoric displacements, sub-texts and figurative stratagems - has its own history. It is suggested in Benedict Anderson's view of the space and time of the modern nation as embodied in the narrative culture of the realist novel, and explored in Tom Nairn's reading of Ernest Powell's post-imperial racism which is based on the 'symbol-fetishism' that infests his febrile, neo-romantic poetry. *To encounter the nation as it is written displays a temporality of culture and social consciousness more in tune with the partial, over determined process by which textual meaning is produced through the articulation of difference in language; more in keeping with the problem of closure which plays enigmatically in the discourse of the sign. Such an approach contests the traditional authority of those national objects of knowledge— Tradition,*

People, the Reason of State, High Culture, for instance—whose pedagogical value often relies on their representation as holistic concepts located within an evolutionary narrative of historical continuity. Traditional histories do not take the nation at its own word, but, for the most part, they do assume that the problem lies with the interpretation of 'events' that have a certain transparency or privileged visibility.

To study the nation through its narrative address does not merely draw attention to its language and rhetoric; it also attempts to alter the conceptual object itself. If the problematic 'closure' of textuality questions the 'totalization' of national culture, then its positive value lies in displaying the wide dissemination through which we construct the field of meanings and symbols associated with national life. This is a project that has a certain currency within those forms of critique associated with 'cultural studies'. Despite the considerable advance this represents, there is a tendency to read the Nation rather restrictively; either, as the ideological apparatus of state power, somewhat redefined by a hasty, functionalist reading of Foucault or Bakhtin; or, in a more utopian inversion, as the incipient or emergent expression of the 'national-popular' sentiment preserved in a radical memory. These approaches are valuable in drawing our attention to those easily obscured, but highly significant, recesses of the national culture from which alternative constituencies of peoples and oppositional analytic capacities may emerge—youth, the everyday, nostalgia, new 'ethnicities', new social movements, 'the politics of difference'. They assign new meanings and different directions to the process of historical change. The most progressive development from such positions take 'a discursive conception of ideology - ideology (like language) is conceptualised in terms of the articulation of elements. As Volosinov said, the ideological sign is always 'multi-accentual and Janus-faced'. But in the heat of political argument the 'doubling' of the sign can often be stilled. The Janus face of ideology is taken at face value and its meaning fixed, in the last instance, on one side of the divide between ideology and 'material conditions.'

It is the project of Nation and Narration to explore the Janus-faced ambivalence of language itself in the construction of the Janus-faced discourse of the nation. This turns the familiar two-faced god into a figure

of prodigious doubling that investigates the nation-space in the process of the articulation of elements: where meanings may be partial because they are in medias res; and history may be half-made because is in the process of being made; and the image of cultural authority may be ambivalent because it is caught, uncertainly, in the act of 'composing' its powerful image. Without such an understanding of the performativity of language in the narratives of the nation, it would be difficult to understand why Edward Said prescribes a kind of 'analytic pluralism' as the *form* of critical attention appropriate to the cultural effects of the nation. *For the nation, as a form of cultural elaboration (in the Gramscian sense), is an agency of ambivalent narration that holds culture at its most productive position, as a force for 'subordination, fracturing, diffusing, reproducing as much as producing, creating, forcing, guiding.*

I wrote to my contributors with a growing, if unfamiliar, sense of the nation as one of the major structures of ideological ambivalence within the cultural representations of 'modernity'. My intention was that we should develop, in a nice collaborative tension, a range of readings that engaged the insights of poststructuralist theories of narrative knowledge—textuality, discourse, enunciation, *écriture*, 'the unconscious as a language' to name only a few strategies - in order to evoke this ambivalent margin of the nation-space. To reveal such a margin is, in the first instance, to contest claims to cultural supremacy, whether these are made from the 'old' post-imperialist metropolitan nations, or on behalf of the 'new' independent nations of the periphery. The marginal or 'minority' is not the space of a celebratory, or utopian, self-marginalization. It is a much more substantial intervention into those justifications of modernity - progress, homogeneity, cultural organicism, the deep nation, the long past - that rationalize the authoritarian, 'normalizing' tendencies within cultures in the name of the national interest or the ethnic prerogative. In this sense, then, the ambivalent, antagonistic perspective of nation as narration will establish the cultural boundaries of the nation so that they may be acknowledged as 'containing' thresholds of meaning that must be crossed, erased, and translated in the process of cultural production.



LET US KNOW

By now, we have learnt that Homi Bhabha is a distinguished name in the field of Postcolonial theory. However, in a 1995 interview with W. J. T. Mitchell, Bhabha stated that Edward Said is the writer who has most influenced him.

The 'locality' of national culture is neither unified nor unitary in relation to itself, nor must it be seen simply as 'other' in relation to what is outside or beyond it. The boundary is Janus-faced and the problem of outside/ inside must always itself be a process of hybridity, incorporating new 'people' in relation to the body politic, generating other sites of meaning and, inevitably, in the political process, producing unmanned sites of political antagonism and unpredictable forces for political representation. The address to nation as narration stresses the insistence of political power and cultural authority in what Derrida describes as the 'irreducible excess of the syntactic over the semantic'. What emerges as an effect of such 'incomplete signification' is a turning of boundaries and limits into the in-between spaces through which the meanings of cultural and political authority are negotiated. It is from such narrative positions between cultures and nations, theories and texts, the political, the poetic and the painterly, the past and the present, *that Nation and Narration seeks to affirm and extend Frantz Fanon's revolutionary credo: 'National consciousness, which is not nationalism, is the only thing that will give us an international dimension'.* It is this international dimension both within the margins of the nation-space and in the boundaries in-between nations and peoples that the authors of this book have sought to represent in their essays. The representative emblem of this book might be a chiasmatic 'figure' of cultural difference whereby the anti-nationalist, ambivalent nation-space becomes the crossroads to a new transnational culture. The 'other' is never outside or beyond us; it emerges forcefully, within cultural discourse, when we think we speak most intimately and indigenously 'between ourselves'.

Without attempting to précis individual essays, I would like briefly to elaborate this movement*, within Nation and Narration, from the problematic*

unity of the nation to the articulation of cultural difference in the construction of an international perspective. The story could start in many places: with David Simpson's reading of the multiform 'body' of Whitman's American populism and his avoidance of metaphor which is also an avoidance of the problems of integration and cultural difference; or Doris Sommer's exploration of the language of love and productive sexuality that allegorizes and organizes the early historical narratives of Latin America which are disavowed by the later 'Boom' novelists; or John Barrell's exploration of the tensions between the civic humanist theory of painting and the 'discourse of custom' as they are drawn together in the ideology of the 'ornamental' in art, and its complex mediation of Englishness; or Sneja Gunew's portrayal of an Australian literature split between an Anglo-Celtic public sphere and a multiculturalist counter-public sphere. It is the excluded voices of migrants and the marginalized that Gunew represents, bringing them back to disturb and interrupt the writing of the Australian canon.

In each of these 'foundational fictions' the origins of national traditions turn out to be as much acts of affiliation and establishment as they are moments of disavowal, displacement, exclusion, and cultural contestation. In this function of national history as *Entstellung*, the forces of social antagonism or contradiction cannot be transcended or dialectically surmounted. There is a suggestion that the constitutive contradictions of the national text are discontinuous and 'interruptive'. This is Geoff Bennington's starting point as he puns (with a certain postmodern prescience) on the 'postal politics' of national frontiers to suggest that 'Frontiers are articulations, boundaries are, constitutively, crossed and transgressed'. It is across such boundaries, both historical and pedagogical, that Martin Thom places Renan's celebrated essay 'What is a nation?'. He provides a careful genealogy of the national idea as it emerges mythically from the Germanic tribes, and more recently in the interrelations between the struggle to consolidate the Third Republic and the emergence of Durkheimian sociology.

What kind of a cultural space is the nation with its transgressive boundaries and its 'interruptive' interiority? Each essay answers this question

differently but there is a moment in Simon During's exposition of the 'civil imaginary' when he suggests that 'part of the modern domination of the life-world by style and civility...is a process of the feminisation of society'. This insight is explored in two very different contexts, Gillian Beer's reading of Virginia Woolf and Rachel Bowlby's study of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Gillian Beer takes the perspective of the aeroplane—war machine, dream symbol, icon of the 1930s poets—to emphasize Woolf's reflections on the island race, and space; its multiple marginal significations—'land and water margins, home, body, individualism'—providing another inflection to her quarrels with patriarchy and imperialism. Rachel Bowlby writes the cultural history of readings of Uncle Tom's Cabin, that debate the feminization of American cultural values while producing a more complex interpretation of her own. The narrative of American freedom, she suggests, displays the same ambivalence that constructs the contradictory nature of femininity in the text. America itself becomes the Dark Continent, doubly echoing the 'image' of Africa and Freud's metaphor for feminine sexuality. George Harris, the former slave, leaves for the new African state of Liberia.

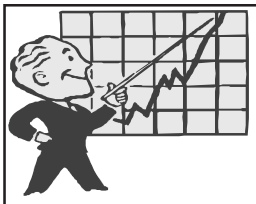
It is when the western nation comes to be seen, in Conrad's famous phrase, as one of the dark corners of the earth, that we can begin to explore new places from which to write histories of peoples and construct theories of narration. Each time the question of cultural difference emerges as a challenge to relativistic notions of the diversity of culture; it reveals the margins of modernity. As a result, most of these essays have ended up in another cultural location from where they started—often taking up a 'minority' position. Francis Mulhern's study of the 'English ethics' of Leavisian universalism pushes towards a reading of Q. D. Leavis's last public lecture in Cheltenham where she bemoans the imperilled state of that England which bore the classical English novel; an England, now, of council-house dwellers, unassimilated minorities, sexual emancipation without responsibility. Suddenly the paranoid system of 'English reading' stands revealed. James Snead ends his interrogation of the ethics and aesthetics of western 'nationalist' universalism with a reading of Ishmael Reed, who 'is revising a prior co-optation of black culture, using a narrative principle

that will undermine the very assumptions that brought the prior appropriation about'. Timothy Brennan produces a panoramic view of the western history of the national idea and its narrative forms, finally to take his stand with those hybridizing writers like Salman Rushdie whose glory and grotesquerie he in their celebration of the fact that English is no longer an English language. This, as Brennan points out, leads to a more articulate awareness of the post-colonial and neo-colonial conditions as authoritative positions from which to speak Janus-faced to east and west. But these positions across the frontiers of history, culture, and language, which we have been exploring, are dangerous, if essential, political projects. Bruce Robbins' reading of Dickens balances the risks of departing from the 'ethical home truths' of humanistic experience with the advantages of developing a knowledge of acting in a dispersed global system. Our attention to 'aporia' he suggests, should be counterpointed with an intentionality that is inscribed in *poros*–practical, technical know-how that abjures the rationalism of universals, while maintaining the practicality, and political strategy, of dealing professionally with local situations that are themselves defined as liminal and borderline.

America leads to Africa, the nations of Europe and Asia meet in Australia; the margins of the nation displace the centre; the peoples of the periphery return to rewrite the history and fiction of the metropolis. The island story is told from the eye of the aeroplane which becomes that ‚ornament' that holds the public and the private in suspense. The bastion of Englishness crumbles at the sight of immigrants and factory workers. The great Whitmanesque sensorium of America is exchanged for a Warhol blowup, a Kruger installation, or Mapplethorpe's naked bodies. 'Magical realism' after the Latin American Boom, becomes the literary language of the emergent post-colonial world. Amidst these exorbitant images of the nation-space in its transnational dimension there are those who have not yet found their nation: amongst them the Palestinians and the Black South Africans. It is our loss that in making this book we were unable to add their voices to ours. Their persistent questions remain to remind us, in some form or measure, of what must be true for the rest of us too: 'When did we

become "a people"? When did we stop being one? Or are we in the process of becoming one? What do these big questions have to do with our intimate relationships with each other and with others?"'

Thus from the reading of the essay, we have learnt that 'Nations; like narratives, lose their origins in the myths of time and only fully realize their horizons in the mind's eye.' This proclamation in the beginning of the essay can serve as a possible starting-point of a postcolonial reading of a major novel written during the period of the Raj in which 'India as the nation' finds a very prominent place. For example, the vast space of the country, in *Gora*, is transformed into some kind of a symbolical space from where and for which the discourse of nationalism can be enunciated in the idioms of 'horizontal society–many as one –people' in a narrative of homogeneous, visual time of the 'nation'.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 4: What is the ambivalence that Bhabha talks about in the beginning of the essay?

Q 5: What is Hanna Arendt's view on the society of the nation in modern worlds?

Q 6: Mention, from your reading of the essay, the important thinkers and critics from whom Bhabha borrowed his ideas?

14.5 CRITICAL RECEPTION OF BHABHA

Homi Bhabha's works over the last few decades has been occasional, his influence has grown far beyond postcolonial literary and cultural studies. However, Bhabha has also been criticized for using indecipherable jargon and dense prose. In 1998, the journal *Philosophy and Literature* awarded Bhabha second prize in its "Bad Writing Competition," which "celebrates bad writing from the most stylistically lamentable passages found in scholarly books and articles." Bhabha was awarded the prize for a sentence in his *The Location of Culture* that reads: "If, for a while, the ruse of desire is calculable for the uses of discipline soon the

repetition of guilt, justification, pseudo-scientific theories, superstition, spurious authorities, and classifications can be seen as the desperate effort to "normalize" formally the disturbance of a discourse of splitting that violates the rational, enlightened claims of its enunciatory modality."

Mark Crispin Miller, a professor of Media Studies at New York University, remarked on Bhabha's writing like this: "One could finally argue that there is no meaning there, beyond the neologisms and Latinate buzzwords. Most of the time I don't know what he's talking about."

In a 2005 interview, Bhabha expressed his annoyance at such criticisms and the implied expectation that philosophers should use the "common language of the common person," while scientists are given a pass for the similar use of language that is not immediately comprehensible to casual readers. In his review entitled "Goodbye to the Enlightenment", Terry Eagleton provided a more substantive critique of Bhabha's work, explaining in *The Guardian* (1994) that "Bhabha's aim is to put the skids under every cherished doctrine of Western Enlightenment, from the idea of progress to the unity of the self, from the classical work of art to the notions of law and civility." Bhabha uses India, for instance, as an example of alternative possibilities when he argues that the very idea and practice of secularism is changing.



14.6 LET US SUM UP

From this unit, we have learnt that Homi K. Bhabha is one of the most important thinkers in the field of Post-colonial criticism. His critical works in the form of books and essays developed a set of challenging concepts that are central to post-colonial theory: hybridity, mimicry, difference, ambivalence. These concepts describe ways in which colonized peoples have resisted the power of the colonizer, a power that is never as secure as it seems to be. His views also illuminate our present situation, in a world marked by a paradoxical combination of violently proclaimed cultural difference and the complexly interconnected networks of globalization. From

this unit, we have also learnt about the idea of the 'nation' as conceived by Homi Bhabha.



14.7 FURTHER READING

Bhabha, Homi. (Ed.). (1990). *Nations and Narration*. London & New York: Routledge.

Bhabha, Homi. (1994). *The Location of Culture.* London and New York: Routledge.

Web Resource:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Homi_K._Bhabha

http://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780190221911/obo-9780190221911-0057.xml

14.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK OUR PROGRESS (Hints Only)



Ans to Q 1: Bhabha is one of the most important figures in contemporary Post-colonial studies… …also known for coining many key terms in the field of Post-colonial theory such as *hybridity*, mimicry, difference, and ambivalence… …these terms describe the ways in which the colonised people have resisted the power of the coloniser, as conceived by Bhabha.

Ans to Q 2: His considerable reputation is based upon two books *Nation and Narration* (1990) an edited volume and *The Location of Culture* (1994)—a collection of his own essays—many of which were published elsewhere and heavily revised.

Ans to Q 3: Mimicry appears when members of a colonized society imitate and take on the culture of the colonizers… …colonial mimicry comes from the colonist's desire for a reformed, recognizable Other… …mimicry is a sign of a double articulation; a strategy which appropriates the Other as it visualizes power… …with the term

Hybridity, Bhabha shows how histories and cultures constantly intrude on the present, demanding that we transform our understanding of cross-cultural relations.

Ans to Q 4: The image of the nation is a particular ambivalence that haunts the idea of the nation, the language of those who write of it and the lives of those who live it… …the ambivalence emerges from a growing awareness that, despite the certainty with which historians speak of the 'origins' of nation, the cultural temporality of the nation inscribes a much more transitional social reality.

Ans to Q 5: In Hannah Arendt's view, the society of the nation in the modern world is 'that curiously hybrid realm where private interests assume public significance' and the two realms flow unceasingly and uncertainly into each other 'like waves in the never-ending stream of the life-process itself'.'

Ans to Q 6: Benedict Anderson's idea of "Imagined Communities"… …Jacques Derrida's idea of Deconstruction… …Jacques Lacan's Psychoanalysis… …Michel Foucault's notion of discursivity… …



14.9 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: Discuss Homi Bhabha's contributions to Postcolonial theory.

Q 2: What are the terms coined and popularised by Homi K. Bhabha? How do they reflect his thinking as a Postcolonial critic?

Q 3: Nations, like narratives, lose their origins in the myths of time. Discuss.

Q 4: How does Homi Bhabha conceptualise the idea of a nation? Elaborate.

Q 5: Write a note on the reception of Homi K. Bhabha as a Postcolonial critic.

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UNIT 15: EDWARD SAID: "INTRODUCTION" FROM *ORIENTALISM*

UNIT STRUCTURE

15.1 Learning Objectives

15.2 Introduction

15.3 Edward Said: Life and Works

15.4 Reading the Text: "Introduction" from *Orientalism*

15.4.1 A Section-wise Overview of "Introduction" to *Orientalism*

15.4.2 Brief Discussion of the Text

15.5 Important Issues Raised

15.6 Reception of Said

15.7 Let us Sum up

15.8 Further Reading

15.9 Ans to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

15.10 Possible Questions

15.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- discuss the life and works of Edward Said
- explain the meaning of the term Orientalism
- highlight the central points of importance discussed by Said in the "Introduction"
- examine how Said's idea of orientalism forms an important concept in the larger body of postcolonial theory

15.2 INTRODUCTION

Dear learners, in this unit, we shall make an attempt to examine the concept of orientalism as we read the "Introduction" to Edward Said's *Orientalism* which is considered to be one of the most important texts in the field of postcolonial theory. Said's *Orientalism* is regarded as one of the major contributions in this area as it brought to focus the ways in which non- Western cultures had been subjected to the hegemonic construction

of the West. "The East"–generally comprising the countries from Asia, North Africa and Middle East–came to represent a homogeneity, which the West looked upon as reflecting the culture of the 'Other'. Said in this book, attempts a critique of the hegemonic construction of East perpetrated through the colonial discourses while looking at it as the consequence of imperial machinery which sought for justifications and legitimizations of its dominion over the non-west. As we read about the 'Introduction' to his book *Orientalism*, in this unit, we shall be able to locate many of Said's major concerns as a postcolonial critic.

15.3 EDWARD SAID: LIFE AND WORKS

Edward Said was born in the year 1935 in Jerusalem, to a Christian Palestinian family, which had an affluent life. However, as his family was displaced, Said grew up in the genteel surrounds of Cairo. He received his college education at Victoria College, Cairo, Mount Hermon School, Massachussetts and at Princeton and Harvard Universities. He was a Visiting Professor of Comparative Literature at Harvard in 1974, a Fellow of the Center for Advanced Study in Behavioural Science at Stanford and a Visiting Professor of Humanities in the John Hopkins University in 1979. Said was also the recipient of several prestigious honours including Harvard University's Bowdoin Prize in 1976 and the Lionel Trilling Award in 1994.

Edward Said has authored several outstanding books some of which include *Joseph Conrad and the Fiction of Autobiography* (1966), *Beginnings: Intention and Method* (1975), *The Question of Palestine* (1979), *Literature and Society* (1980), *The World, the Text and the Critic* (1984), *Covering Islam* (1981), *After the Last Sky* (1986), *Blaming the Victims* (1988), *Musical Elaborations* (1991), *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), *Representations of the Intellectual* (1994) and *Peace and its Discontents: Essays on Palestine and Middle East Peace Process* (1996). Since his childhood, Said was influenced by a number of factors such as the effect of missionaries, British colonialism, his father's professing of American patriotism, the attempts at marginalising of Arab history, culture and language within his family and its silence about Palestine, his Western education including his American

education and his American citizenship and so on. Moreover, Said had also been subjected to the overwhelming social, political and cultural happenings during the period from 1948 to 1967 made him recognize that terms such as America, Europe, or even Islam are in fact 'constructed' categories although they apparently seem innocent and that it is rather impossible to have purist categories in such entities.

Let us have a brief survey of some of the significant texts authored by Said, which shall throw light on the primary issues that are of importance to his works and his philosophy. *The World, the Text and the Critic* is a collection of essays on diverse issues authored by Said and these were composed in the period spreading across 1969 to 1981. In one of the essays contained in this collection, Said has remarked that "texts are worldly, to some degree they are events and, even when they appear to deny it, they are nevertheless a part of the social world, human life and of course the historical moments in which they are located and interpreted" (4) This view of Said throws light on his approach to the activity of reading and writing in relation to his engagement as a responsible intellectual in the larger domain of academics. It is such an approach which highlights Said's "beginning intention and method" in terms of the later works which was to write.

In *The World*, Said acknowledges the significant contributions forwarded by Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault in the world of contemporary theory and how going by their approach, the processes of reading and writing has come to be looked upon in an unconventional manner. However, it is also significant to note that for Said it is not only the theoretical underpinnings of critical discourse that occupies centre stage; rather it is perhaps more important to understand the challenging forces which lead to the production of a certain text at a given point of time. Therefore, it is important for the critic to be neutral towards the text – to maintain an equal distance from "critical systems and from the dogmas and orthodoxies of the dominant culture". In this collection of essays, Said contends that it is necessary for the critic to be conscious and responsive towards history, to be aware of the limitations and constraints created by social, political and multifaceted human experience in the process of living,

which influence the shaping of a text. In his own unique manner, Said provides a subtle yet influential and original meaning to literary criticism in modern society.

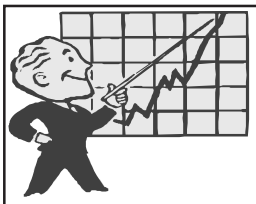
Beginnings: Intention and Method is one of those works, which belong to the early period of Said's career. Here, Said declares, "the writer's life, his career, and his text form a system of relationships whose configuration *in real human time* becomes progressively stronger" (227). Critics and theorists are of the opinion that *Beginnings* reflect Said's penchant for philology and its acclaimed practitioners and its application of 'generalism' as a method of intellectual performance. Such an approach has perhaps enabled Said to evolve a counter position in relation to his stance as a professional intellectual in the sphere of academics and public space as well while giving shape to a 'oppositional humanistic critical practice.' It is in this work that Said developed his idea on the method of contrapuntal reading, which, according to Paul Gilroy, is a "politically-informed evaluation that sets the logic of particular cultural forms in concrete relationships with the historical processes that shaped them, and to which they in turn contribute." Said's life as a displaced Palestinian has exerted a significant influence in giving shape to his position as a literary and cultural critic. It is noteworthy that Said's personal history has a considerable contribution in making his critical work appear real and relevant for the academia and the reading public in general. In him, one would perhaps be able to discern the merging of the academic the political; and this is evident in the fact that he could actively stand for the Palestinian cause despite having a distinguished stint as a Professor at Columbia University. Besides, it is also interesting to note that Said established himself as a distinguished opera critic, a public speaker, a pianist and an essayist who contributed frequently to Arab newspapers.

In his later works such as *Culture and Imperialism* and *Orientalism* (1978), Said develops further on the method of contrapuntal reading through which makes an effort to reveal that all creative and academic works appear as ideological products situated within a certain social, political and cultural context. As such, these works do not seem to engage with aesthetics solely;

rather what becomes more important is an understanding of the political and ideological forces that were responsible in producing those works at a given point of time. Said is of the view that Western literary output cannot claim autonomy and that the historical, economic, political, cultural and social factors had immensely contributed towards the shaping of literature. It is also noteworthy that such Western discourse, according to Said had produced the non-West as a homogenised entity, as its other, the "imagined communities" to employ Benedict Anderson's phrase– the 'non-West' thus seemed as within reach, visible and predictable to the West. In *Culture and Imperialism,* which was published after *Orientalism*, Said argues that though culture may be distinguished from imperialism, both terms are interrelated. According to him, imperialism may be defined as "thinking about, settling on, controlling land that you do not possess, that is distant, that is lived on and owned by others" (CI, 7). Subsequently, he goes on to analyse how imperial ideology is still functional especially in the American context post World War II despite the non-existence of colonies.

Another significant text by Said is *Representations of the Intellectual*–a collection of essays based on 1993 Reith Lectures. These essays are an exploration of the idea of being an intellectual in the contemporary times. Said tries to examine the role of the intellectual in the present socio-political scenario while questioning if the intellectual's responsibility can be limited solely to specialised issues concerning academics or do an intellectuals need to associate themselves to the manifold social, political, cultural or other such issues which afflict contemporary lives. Like in all his works Said, the distinguished critic of culture, appears brilliant and impresses his readers through his objective analyses and eloquent writing. Said looks at the intellectual as one who is rather an amateur and an exile in that his or her affiliations should rest with the greater interest of society whereby he/she shall be always inspired to "speak the truth to power" even if it meant putting to risk his individual interests. Perhaps, such belief in the intrinsic value of the intellectual/critic enabled Said to speak for the Palestinian cause despite being an American citizen working in an American University. His approach in the essays reveals

quite clearly that Said had objections to intellectual submitting to the dominant ideologies and exercise of power.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: Name some important works by Edward Said.

Q 2: In which work did Said introduce his idea of 'contrapuntal reading'?

Q 3: What does Said's *Representations of the Intellectual* tend to state?

15.4 READING THE TEXT: "INTRODUCTION FROM *ORIENTALISM*

Let us now examine the basic issues raised in *Orientalism*. First published in 1978, this book generated widespread controversy and attention as well owing to its attempt at counter reading of conventional Western assumptions regarding 'non-West'. Said makes an extensive argument to project how the West has been responsible in constructing the East the other through discourse. Western discourse, according to Said, has been to a considerable extent responsible in producing the 'Orient' which in turn, paved the way for establishing and legitimising West's imperialist ideology through social, political and cultural hegemony. Said's scrutiny of colonial representation of the non-West in *Orientalism* depend largely on the theoretical ideas of Michel Foucault, especially on the notion of discourse and the knowledge/power equation.

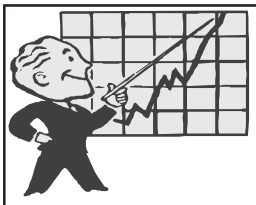
The idea of Discourse occupies primary significance in Foucault's philosophy and critical thought. Foucault views discourse as any mode of communication and representation which is established, defined and justified by certain codes within a specific socio-cultural situation. It is through the system validated through a certain discourse which makes us perceive reality in the manner in which we do, thereby shaping the entire process of meaning while producing the ideas related to right or wrong, constituting the range of valid utterances both verbal and through representation, designates the right to speak for and exercise power over everything that may be subjected to such power as legitimised through discourse. Thus, Foucault considers

discourse to be a potent force which leads to the construction of identities, subject positions, processes of thought, and meaning through multiple discursive practices within a society and culture.

Besides Foucault, Said's idea of Orientalism may be said to have been influenced by the concept of hegemony as well drawn from the critical theory propounded by Antonio Gramsci. The Italian Marxist philosopher and Communist politician, Antonio Gramsci is made famous by his theoretical concept related to cultural hegemony. Cultural hegemony, according to Gramsci, is the way in which the dominant class, for instance, the state and the capitalist class employ the cultural institutions to maintain power in a society, which is predominantly capitalist. The capitalists facilitate the evolution of a hegemonic culture through the use of ideology. Without any violent exercise, economic pressure or coercion, it is through propagation of ideology that hegemonic culture establishes its own normative values in a manner that these appear natural and given in the lived lives of the people. In this way, hegemonic power derives consent from the subjects towards the capitalist order.

However, it is also important to remember that it is on the basis of the institutions that constitute the superstructure through which the dominant capitalist class engages in the production and reproduction of cultural hegemony. Edward Said employs Gramsci's concept of hegemony to reveal how Orientalism as a system of representations supported the consolidation of the West's authority and supremacy over the East, and discusses how it was not limited merely to a reflection or description of the East. Echoing Foucault, Said proposes to disclose how the real Western imperial practices exercised through governance, administration, social and cultural life, the numerous images and motifs, ideas and texts were all in fact, interdependent and reinforced one another–the strategy of dominion and control over the 'non-West' adopted by the imperial power. It is this understanding that allows Said to perceive western scholarship regarding the Orient, which was commonly known as Orientalism prior to Said, as inevitably linked to and produced by the inherent imperialist mechanism of dominion and control. Through his work Said attempts to show how although colonialism apparently

seems to have been a bygone concept, it may nevertheless be seen in practice in the manner of social, cultural and political intercourse and representations among different countries across the globe. Owing to its rational and in-depth critical enquiry which exposes the inherent central tenets and constructs of colonial culture embedded within diverse systems of knowledge and representation, Said's ground-breaking text has come to be considered as one of the most seminal texts in the realm of post-colonial critical school.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 4: Mention the names of the two theorists who influenced Said.

Q 5: What is cultural hegemony?

15.4.1 A Section wise Overview of "Introduction" to *Orientalism*

Section I: Said introduces the idea that the Orient is primarily a European invention, which serves to reinforce the European notion of the 'Other'. However, the ways in which the cultural and ideological constructions of the Orient came to be represented in the colonial discourses, it began to exist as a living entity. Said enumerates upon certain qualifying traits of Orientalism stating that it is an academic discipline concerning research, teaching, learning and other associated academic activities which have the Orient as its primary subject matter. Orientalism is also, according to Said, a style of thought through which the West had indulged in the production of the Orient as the 'Other'–a way of perceiving which comprises political, cultural, sociological perspectives. The Orient thus constructed provided a sense of strength, identity and legitimacy to European imperial machinery across the colonies. He also considers Orientalism as a corporate institution, which not only produces the orient, controls and regulates the orient.

Section II: The Orient just like the Occident is a man made category, which has a history, comprises a tradition of thought, which exists as reality in the Western imagination. The two binaries Orient and Occident stand in complementary relation to each other. Western approach to the Orient is predominantly influenced by the ideological assumptions of the West regarding the non-Western cultures. However, it is also very important to remember that any understanding of the Orient necessitates an understanding of the configurations of power that existed between the two–as both are bound in a relationship of power, therefore, a study of the cultural and historical aspects of this relationship shall enable one to arrive at an understanding of the varying degrees of complex hegemony. Western hegemony is perhaps best reflected in the manner in which the West has, very often spoken for or represented the East–the East has always been considered as a silent marginal entity–it is through the 'representations' that the Orient could be 'made Oriental' and thereby produced. However, the Orient is not merely a mythical object; rather, and more importantly it is the reflection of the European-Atlantic exercise of power over the Orient. Eventually, Orientalism developed into a created body of theory and practice, which has permeated into Western consciousness.

Section III: In this section, Said discusses his methodological strategy while doing Orientalism. In order to elaborate upon the methodology of his study and the limitations thereof, Said brings up the distinction between 'pure' and 'political knowledge'. While asserting his approach as a humanist, Said however argues that any knowledge that is produced within a given period shall always have the political, social, cultural and historical aspects embedded within it. The scholar is situated within these specificities and therefore, it would be rather difficult to get rid of the influences upon the author. Therefore, the 'knowledge' produced by the West regarding the 'non-West' as its other was very much influenced by the social, cultural, political and historical fact of colonialism and as

such its objectivity becomes debatable. Owing to the complexities involved in doing Orientalism, Said explains his methodology as a two-way strategy – first, is the strategic location which "is a way of describing the author's position in a text with regard to the Oriental material he writes about", and secondly strategic formation, which is a way of analysing the relationship between texts and the way in which groups of texts, types of texts, even textual genres, acquire mass, density, and referential power among themselves and thereafter in the culture at large." In relation to this, Said also discusses his personal history and how that has been significant in his evolution as a critic of Western cultural hegemony.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 6: What are the primary qualifying traits of Orientalism?

Q 7: Differentiate between strategic location and strategic formation.

15.4.2 Brief Discussion of the Text:

Said begins his Introduction to *Orientalism* by asserting that the image of the 'Orient' may be attributed largely to European imagination—"The Orient was almost a European invention" (*Orientalism,* p-1). According to Said, the idea of the non-West as the Orient enabled the West to specify its own contours while he elaborates how "the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience" (p.1-2). Said argues that the discourse of Orientalism is not a given category rather it is constructed while he takes recourse to the theoretical concept of discourse put forth by Michel Foucault. As stated earlier, discourse according to Foucault may be defined as the various ways in which knowledge is constituted in relation to the social and cultural practices vis-a-vis human relationships, subjectivity and exercise of power in any given society. In this sense then, discourse may be considered a representative of the social and cultural mores intended

to produce a certain sense of meaning thereby granting legitimacy to the ideological structures of the dominant culture. This is however, not to say that anything considered a discourse is false; rather one needs to perhaps understand that it is through discourse that the construction of a certain 'reality' is facilitated, a reality that is embedded in the lived facts of life encompassing all spheres of human activity ranging from politics to warfare, culture to literature, representation through media among many others.

Therefore, given such understanding, Orientalism as a discourse would perhaps imply the construction of the 'Orient' as the 'other' seen through the practices of imperial culture executed through the West. Such construction, rely on "an ontological and epistemological distinction made between "the Orient" and (most of the time) "the Occident" (p. 2) according to Said. Through his engagement with the idea of Orientalism, Said embarks upon the analyses of texts primarily to elucidate the fact that there is no severance between ideas, images and representations and tangible physical reality. Consequent to this, he asserts how Orientalism has produced an extremely domineering organization of control due to the combination of real establishments of power and those constituted through discourse. A closer look at the complementary relationship shared between say for instance, colonial military establishment and literature–both have political and cultural dimensions, administrative and anthropological aspects, all of which complement one another in theory and practice while reinforcing and strengthening Western hegemony over the Orient.

Contemporary research according to Said has been unable to rise above its subjective concerns in that it continues to remain Eurocentric, still not being able to recognise the political nature of the apparently 'pure' knowledge it has produced. The very foundations of research has been established through the canons and parameters justified by the West; an access to the East as a concept for instance, can be made possible only through the canon of

knowledge already produced and crystallised by the West about the East. Said also alludes to his personal history while analysing how it would be rather difficult for him to free himself from the political influences in relation to his research. Considering such circumstances, it is only natural that there would be perhaps multiple areas, which would raise doubts and debates in Orientalism. However, it is also acknowledged worldwide that Said's study came to be recognised as one of the significant works in the area of postcolonial critical theory and literary studies for its analytical exploration of the colonial cultural practices and discussion of the ways in which ideology and power politics play a crucial role in the production of knowledge.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 8: In what ways does orient and occident share a complementary relationship?

15.5 IMPORTANT ISSUES RAISED

We have by now gained an overview of the 'Introduction' to Edward Said's *Orientalism*, considered a milestone in the school of contemporary postcolonial theory. *Orientalism* is accorded a place of significance owing to its rational and committed analysis of colonial discourse, which served the agenda of imperial power structures. It is also important here to understand Said's observations regarding the function of the academic/ critic in relation to his/her research and the knowledge he/she produces thereafter. Said advocates for objectivity in these without which the purpose of any research would perhaps be defeated. Let us now try to arrive at some of the central theoretical issues, which were raised by Said through his text and make an effort to understand how these issues appear relevant in the field of literary studies.

One needs to keep in mind that Said figures as one of the most influential figures in postcolonial theory. The theories that pertain to colonial discourses appear to have largely responsible in the development of

postcolonialism. Postcolonial theory in general engages in an exploration of the modes of representation and perception while arriving at an understanding how these discourses had been employed as tools and strategies of exercising colonial power and legitimise subjection and imperial hegemony. Said's seminal work *Orientalism* deals with such issues at length revealing how the politics of language and representation were at work during the colonial regime to perpetuate the aims of European imperialism. Some of the central theoretical issues that Said works with in his text may be highlighted as follows:

1. Said puts forward three defining traits of Orientalism–it is an academic tradition; it is a style of thought premised on a radical distinction between Orient and the Occident; Orientalism is also a Western style for dominating the East.
2. Said examines the binaries of coloniser/colonised while looking at the ways in which discourse produced a certain mode of constructing meaning in relation to the contemporary society and culture during the period of colonisation.
3. Said employs the theoretical ideas of Foucault and Gramsci in discussing the significance of power in producing discourse and legitimising hegemony.
4. Said's critique of colonial representation reveals that the knowledge regarding the colonies that was created and thus validated served to stabilise the Self/Other binaries in which the colonised perpetually emerged as the Other.
5. Said's critique also analyses how in fact, the coloniser was also in the need to have an Other without which it's own identity appeared rather vague.
6. Said's attempt to re-read and critique colonial discourse and representations may be understood as an effort to 'write back' and 'reclaim the past'–the fundamental activity that postcolonial critics and thinkers engage with.

In his 'Introduction', Said has stated, "the Orient is not an inert fact of nature. It is not merely there, just as the Occident itself is not just there either. (…) such locales, regions, geographical sectors as 'Orient' and 'Occident' are man-made" (4-5). Such observation reveals that the central essence of his thesis is perhaps premised upon an exploration of the processes through which the two aforementioned geographical entities– the Orient and the Occident are produced in and through Orientalism. Therefore, Said emphasises the need to look at Orientalism, which is made apparent as a 'style of thought', through the systematic the network of institutions or even an academic discipline, which operate as discourse on the larger whole. Said's analysis reveals the significance of understanding European dominion of the Orient facilitated through the discursive practices of imperial hegemonic culture. The purpose of Orientalism according to Said is as follows: "(…) the phenomenon of Orientalism as I study it here deals principally, not with a correspondence between Orientalism and the Orient, but with the internal consistency of Orientalism and its ideas about the Orient (the East as a career) despite or beyond any correspondence, or lack thereof, with a 'real' Orient" (1978: 5).

Said's wish to explore the 'internal consistency' reveals the need to examine the ways in which the politics of construction lead to the formation and legitimation of ideas regarding the notion of the Orient as the other.

It is interesting to note that the theoretical issues raised by Said's Orientalism may be applied in the study of texts that would lead to an enriched understanding of the ways in which language works through the politics of representation while creating and legitimising certain perceptions of the lived experience in which conforms to the dominant ideological structures. John McLeod in *Beginning Postcolonialism* is of the opinion that there were – "three forms of textual analysis [which] became popular in the wake of *Orientalism*.

One involved *re-reading canonical English literature* in order to examine if past texts perpetuated or questioned the latent assumptions of colonial discourses…In one direction, critics looked at writers who dealt manifestly with colonial themes and argued about whether their work was

supportive or critical of colonial discourses…In another direction, texts that seemingly had little to do with colonialism,…were also re-read provocatively in terms of colonial discourses...

Second, a group of critics who worked in the main with the poststructuralist thought of Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault and Jacques Lacan began to enquire in particular into the *representation of colonised subjects* in a variety of colonial texts, not just literary ones…

The third form of literary analysis engendered by the turn to theory brought together some of the insights gained by theories of colonial discourses with readings of the new literatures from countries with a history of colonialism…it became popular to argue that these texts were primarily concerned with *writing back to the centre*…(23-25).

When one examines the above observation by McLeod, it becomes quite clear how Said's theoretical approach to Orientalism can be adopted as a mode of reading and analysing the imperial strategies which worked through the images, symbols and language creating a certain perception regarding the colonies. These representations in fact, served to legitimise colonial rule thereby strengthening the processes of 'othering'–the meaning constructed around the image of the native as the silent, passive, lacking Other, inhabiting the margin apart from the centre–forever in need to be 'represented'. What Orientalism as a part of postcolonial approach does is that it equips the contemporary reader to look at the text as discourse–as a product of a certain cultural hegemony reflective of the ideological practices of the dominant class thereby providing one with not only the ways in 'how' we read but also importantly 'what' we read.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 9: What is the purpose of Orientalism, according to Said?

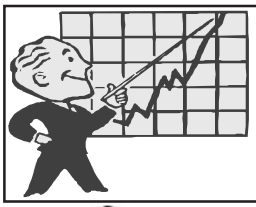
15.6 RECEPTION OF SAID

Said has been received critically in relation to his contribution to the postcolonial critical school through his views on Orientalism. It has been

acknowledged by Said himself that his study on Orientalism is not free from limitations, which is perhaps true for any area of study in the realm of humanities and the social sciences. Nevertheless, Said has to be accorded due credit for initiating a new way of looking at the cultural politics at work that served to stabilise the exercise of imperial power. He has been acclaimed for his rational and analytical critique of the Western representations of the Orient.

There are also critics such as Bernard Lewis, who is of the opinion that Said's treatise is faulty with several factual, methodological and conceptual errors. For instance, Lewis considers Said's approach as ignorant of the authentic contributions made to the study of the Eastern society and culture by several scholarly figures from the West till the 19th century. Critical views on Said considers his study to be rather limited as Said confines his analysis primarily to British and French imperial exercises. Throughout the 20th century, there has been sustained criticism of Said and his views on Orientalism. However, Said's work is considered one the most important works in the intellectual field owing to its elaborate discussion of the Orientalist ideas and intellectual relations in terms of colonial enterprise.

Critical view also regards Said's application of Foucault's concepts and Gramsci's ideas as faulty in his discussion of colonial discourse on the ground that Said appears to homogenise and generalise his inferences while attempting to critique imperial representations of the Orient. There are critics who are of the opinion that Said has indulged in a sort of misrepresentation of the history of Orientalist scholarship–that Said's critique of Orientalist scholarship appears to have failed to recognise the situational context of the institutions, texts, and authors he had taken up for his study, Said's study seems to appear unable to appreciate the multiple forms of Western culture which were not founded solely on a radical difference between a superior Western culture and an inferior non-Western culture. On the contrary, the Oriental forms of art and culture, according to critical opinion acted as inspirational objects, which were very carefully and interestingly incorporated into creative field in the West.



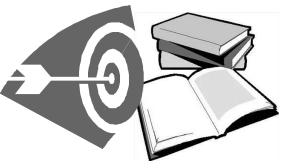
CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 10: On what grounds did Bernard Lewis criticise Said?



15.7 LET US SUM UP

From this unit, we have learnt that Orientalism is a systematic discourse aiming at the production of knowledge. From our discussion above, it is clear that for Said, the object of study is to look at Orientalism as a discourse–a body of knowledge that had been produced by the West in relation to its Eastern counterpart. It is important for us to remember that the texts that were produced from the countries with a colonial history are the primary object of study, as these shall enable the critic to look at the ways in which the Western perceptions of the Orient produced through the exercise of hegemonic culture and the political nature of discourse as well.



15.8 FURTHER READING

Ahmad, Aijaz. (1992). *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures*. Verso.

Bhabha, Homi K. (1994). *The Location of Culture*. Routledge.

Childs, Peter & Patrick Williams. (1997). *An Introduction to Post-Colonial Theory*. Harvester Wheatsheaf.

MacKenzie, John M. (1995). *Orientalism: History, Theory and the Arts*. Manchester University Press.

McLeod, John. (2010). *Beginning Postcolonialism*. Manchester University Press.

Said, Edward. (1978). *Orientalism*. Penguin.

15.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (Hints Only)

Ans to Q 1: *Joseph Conrad and the Fiction of Autobiography* (1966), *Beginnings: Intention and Method* (1975), *The Question of Palestine*

(1979), *Literature and Society* (1980), *The World, the Text and the Critic* (1984), *Covering Islam* (1981), *After the Last Sky* (1986), *Blaming the Victims (*1988), *Musical Elaborations* (1991), *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), *Representations of the Intellectual* (1994) and *Peace and its Discontents: Essays on Palestine and Middle East Peace Process* (1996).

Ans to Q 2: *Beginnings: Intention and Method*… …Said further develops the method of contrapuntal reading in *Culture and Imperialism* and *Orientalism.*

Ans to Q 3: The essays contained in the book are an exploration of the idea of being an intellectual in the contemporary times… …he examines the role of the intellectual in the present socio-political scenario while questioning if the intellectual's responsibility can be limited solely to specialised issues concerning academics or do an intellectuals need to associate themselves to the manifold social, political, cultural or other such issues which afflict contemporary lives.

Ans to Q 4: Said borrowed the idea of Discourse from Michel Foucault… …he also borrowed from the concept of hegemony propounded by Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci.

Ans to Q 5: Cultural hegemony, according to Gramsci, is the way in which the dominant class, for instance, the state and the capitalist class employ the cultural institutions to maintain power in a society which is predominantly capitalist. The capitalists facilitate the evolution of a hegemonic culture through the use of ideology.

Ans to Q 6: The Orient is primarily a European invention… …the Orient came to be represented in the colonial discourses, it began to exist as a living entity… …it is an academic discipline concerning research, teaching, learning and other associated academic activities with the Orient as its primary subject matter… …Orientalism is also a thought through which the West had indulged in the production of the Orient as the 'Other'.

Ans to Q 7: Strategic location "is a way of describing the author's position in a text with regard to the Oriental material he writes about"… …strategic formation is a way of analysing the relationship between texts and the way in which groups of texts, types of texts, even textual

genres, acquire mass, density, and referential power among themselves and thereafter in the culture at large."

Ans to Q 8: Orient and Occident stand in complementary relation to each other… …western approach to the Orient is predominantly influenced by the ideological assumptions of the West regarding the non-Western cultures… …it is also important to remember that any understanding of the Orient necessitates an understanding of the configurations of power that existed between the two–as both are bound in a relationship of power.

Ans to Q 9: Said stated, "(…) the phenomenon of Orientalism as I study it here deals principally, not with a correspondence between Orientalism and the Orient, but with the internal consistency of Orientalism and its ideas about the Orient (the East as a career) despite or beyond any correspondence, or lack thereof, with a 'real' Orient".

Ans to Q 10: Bernard Lewis opined that Said's treatise is faulty with several factual, methodological and conceptual errors… …Lewis considers Said's approach as ignorant of the authentic contributions made to the study of the Eastern society and culture by several scholarly figures from the West till the 19th century.



15.10 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: Discuss Edward Said's works in terms of his engagement with the concept of the Orient and Occident.

Q 2: Do you think that Said's book *Orientalism* inaugurated the post-colonialist discourse? Justify your views.

Q 3: Write a note on *Culture and Imperialism.* What are the important issues raised by Said in this book. Discuss.

Q 4: What are important issues raised by Said in the text prescribed for your studies? Discuss the three forms of textual analysis highlighted by McLeod in *Beginning Postcolonialism.*

Q 5: Elaborate upon the term Orientalism from your reading of the prescribed piece.

Q 6: Examine Edward Said's contribution to Postcolonial theory.

*** ***** ***



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Web Resource:

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Name of the Paper:
Course Code:

Centre for Internal Quality Assurance (CIQA)
Kakatiya Kala Mandir, Kakatiya University
Old Office, Hanamkonda, Telangana

Learner's Feedback on Course

Dear Learner,

Regarding the course as mentioned above, we would like to know your opinion and comments so as to improve the quality of self learning materials in future. Please respond to the following statements by ticking the appropriate box that most reflects your opinion. After completion of the additional comments, please detach the page and send back the same to us at the address given below.

The Director, Centre for Internal Quality Assurance, Kakatiya Kala Mandir Open University
Hanamkonda Complex, Hanam, Telangana- 506009
(E-mail ID: ciqa@kkmou.ac)

1. Approximately how many hours did you spend for studying the units in this course?
2. Please give your opinion (Tick ✓ mark) to the following items based on your reading of the block.

Sl. No.	Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
i.	The block/ the course fulfill the learning objectives set out in the beginning of each unit					
ii.	The units of the block/ course satisfy the prescribed credit and requirements					
iii.	The Units/ course have excellent knowledge base in the course contents					
iv.	Language and contents of the units were presented in a way which could easily understand					
v.	Ample opportunity for participation in the activities provided in the units					
vi.	Units/ Block/ Illustrations/ Diagrams/ tables/ etc. in the course are useful					
vii.	Quality of content is engaging, relevant and up-to-date					
viii.	The self check questions are very helpful					
ix.	The Units/ the model questions and the answers to check my progress have benefited me a lot					

Additional Comments: (Please fill in as much as you want to comment)

1. Which aspects of the SLM, according to you, worked well?

2. Write any challenges/recommendations you faced while studying/ any suggestions to improve the overall quality of the SLM?

Thank you for sending the form to complete this form.

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